Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
March 1, 2019

HB 7148: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTEENTH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Albert F. Banks

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Albert Banks and I am a registered voter in West Haven.

I am here to testify regarding HB 7148 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTEENTH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

I have been a member of staff with Bridge House in Bridgeport, CT for less than two months and I am very proud. Very proud to be a part Bridge House on-going success in supporting adults with persisting mental illness maintain stability in their lives. Bridge House provides an environment to help strengthen our members’ mental wellness and supports our members goals of living more independent, prosperous lives.

I am a Recovery Support Specialist, which means I work as a peer counselor to other Bridge House people fighting to overcome their own mental illness challenges. I am pleased, impressed and blessed to be with an organization where I have already seen people growing in confidence, successfully facing new challenges – successfully, making good decisions in their lives and progressing, working to move forward in life. So many strong positives at Bridge House.

When my immediate supervisor, William Acosta, asked if I wanted to testify, I told him I would. He asked me what I might like to say and I said a few sentences first and stopped. Just then, it hit me exactly what kind of community organization I was part of. What I had just realized is that I was speaking about Bridge House in a way that took for granted the fact that it even existed. I was speaking of all the positives of Bridge House and not thinking clearly enough that Bridge House could simply disappear or lose its strength if some people in Hartford forgot about us or got preoccupied with other things.
I realized that the most important thing Bridge House does is support the mental health of its members at a level that contributes to their well-being at the most basic level or even helps to keep some of our member’s alive.

Bridge House provides members with assistance to maintain or improve their residential situations but we also provide a place where members can go to challenge their minds and provide structure - which goes a long way to keeping a person, on the edge of mental clarity, in far better place to handle their own residential needs.

Bridge House provides employment assistance but it also provides the type of environment where members contribute to the clubhouse’s functioning –our members are productive people. They are involved in the clubhouse administration, provide support for all of our member programs; culinary area, snack bar and daily cash receipts, water plants, maintenance and other functions and responsibilities.

Bridge House provides guidance for those wanting to pursue more education but it also provides an environment that insists that members take part in their own self-betterment. Members don’t have to be ambitious exactly, but they have to show that they are vested in keeping themselves well and positively contributing to a healthy future for themselves.

Bridge House does provide an atmosphere that offers the benefits of fellowship at the clubhouse, but it also provides an excellent environment that goes a long way to defeating isolation – which is one of the worst threats to the basic well-being and physical survival for someone living with mental illness, some of whom are alone in the world.

In my opinion, anyone who walks through our doors, deserve all of the support they are getting and much more because they are saying that don’t want to be a threat, burden, worry or for anyone else, let alone themselves. We shouldn’t forget that. They come to us because they want to be part good part of the Bridgeport community. We as a community and society, should be even more willing than we are to meet them half way.