Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Nina Cohen and I am Mental Health Assistant 2 (MH2) at Connecticut Mental Health Center. I am here tonight to talk about a female client we recently lost to a drug overdose.

Her story starts last July when she entered our program. She came in quiet and reserved but eventually opened up to the many staff in the house. Her struggle with drugs was an ongoing battle and staff went above and beyond our duties when it came to caring for this client. We were not asked to but we would drive around Middletown looking for her when we disappeared and a few times we would find her and talk her into coming home. Obviously we were not able to convince her all the time but we never gave up.

Unfortunately, we had that “gut feeling” that she would be one of the hundreds of young adults that would lose this fight against drug addiction due to the kind of conversations we would have with her. She was really struggling but it didn’t stop us from talking to her one-on-one. It didn’t stop us from many conversations with her distraught parents every time we had to call and inform them that their child had once again left the house to go and use. We were also a listening ear for her peers who were worried about her.

On February 2nd we had to file a missing person’s report on this client. She had only been gone two days but because staff had a connection with her we knew immediately something was very different about this time. On February 3rd she was found unresponsive in an alley in Middletown and brought to the hospital as a Jane Doe. Due to the missing person’s report she was able to be identified in a matter of hours and not days. Staff went to visit her in the hospital but unfortunately her prognosis was not good. On February 10th she succumbed to the effects of the overdose.

Since then, staff have been the support system for her peers who are devastated and for her heartbroken family. Even though this is one example of the work we do it is more than a job. We become an extension of family for those who need help or a family member for those without family. We have even been support to the families who are at a loss about how to help their child.

We have a young man who completed our program five years ago who calls the program almost on a weekly basis looking for support from his previous worker. He calls asking for job leads, apartment openings, or how to bake chicken for dinner that night. Today this young man is employed and living independently in his own apartment and most importantly, he is a contributing member of society. He identified with this program and his primary worker who worked closely with him for the 6 years he was with us. If you cut funding for our programs, young men and women like the ones I just described will be hurt. Please do not cut mental health services.

Thank you for your time.