Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
HB 7148 AAC the State Budget
March 1, 2019
Christopher Hamel

Good evening Senator Osten, Rep Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Friday, March 1st, 2019. My name is Christopher Hamel. I am a registered voter, living in Willimantic, Connecticut with my wife, Alyssa.

Clubhouses, like the Lighthouse, prevent chaos. I’m sure some of you have heard a lot as to why clubhouses need more funding. For those of you who don’t know what a clubhouse is, it is a place that offers friendship, employment, volunteer opportunities, education, and psychiatric services in a safe and caring environment. Approaching this from a slightly different angle from my peers, I have this to say:

In the wake of several public shootings in the past decade, violence is not something one takes lightly, nor is it a topic one finds comfortable to discuss. Yet, it seems that the most disquieting topics are the ones that need the most tending to. A lack of mental health services has been one of the major blamers for the violence we see in our country and state. No doubt, these pointing fingers produce a stigma and even a great hatred among the masses, but there’s also an uncomfortable truth. Many violent individuals are mentally ill—whether that be to themselves or to others. Here’s a little caveat though: mental illness does not cause violence, but the lack of treatment may cause a person that is in extreme need of services to lose touch with reality. Being surrounded by people who share my struggle is one of the great joys of being a member of the Lighthouse.

Once upon a time however, I possessed thoughts as violent as the most primal murderer. The line between reality and fantasy had been thin to me. By my preteen and early teenage eyes, I saw people bullying other people—regardless of age. I wanted to lash out, and so suffered day-in and day-out, fantasizing about hurting people. From my own perspective, at that time, humans sucked.

Thank God, my mother and grandparents saw the signs and sent me to Natchaug Hospital before it was too late. Looking back on those years is like looking at a ghost of myself, but without the services I received, the friendships of likeminded people I made in clubhouses, and the coping skills I developed, it’s truly terrifying when thinking about what could’ve been.

Here’s another uncomfortable truth: Not everyone is as lucky as I am. My first realization of what kind of monster I could’ve been occurred in 2012, when Adam
Lanza walked into Sandy Hook Elementary School in our very own Newton, Connecticut, killing 20 children and 6 adults. Lanza had Asperger’s Syndrome, Depression, Anxiety, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder—all of which, save the latter, I have been diagnosed with.

I’m going to ask all you something: If Adam Lanza had gotten the help he needed early enough, could we be looking at an Adam Lanza, a young man who helps children rather than kills them?

More funding for mental health services, especially social clubhouses like the Lighthouse not only helps those that need services, but save lives as well. Monsters are not made, they are formed.

Let’s stop that formation together.

Thank you.