March 1, 2019
Testimony before the Appropriations Committee regarding:

H.B. No. 7148: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Good afternoon Senators Osten and Formica, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Luis Perez and I am here to comment on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

As President and CEO of Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), a 110-year-old nonprofit, and a board member of The Alliance: The Voice of Community Nonprofits, I am here to express my concern of what more cuts will do to disrupt essential community services to thousands of Connecticut residents.

I appreciate the difficulties this state continues to face, and I recognize Governor Lamont’s effort to limit the negative impact on the individuals and families served by MHC and other nonprofits. I believe it’s important for the legislature to understand how more budget cuts will have an impact on MHC and those who benefit from our services.

Historically, Human Services have taken on a disproportionate piece of the cuts over other departments that are funded through discretionary funding. We are not fixed costs in the budget. That means we are left to whatever remains, and then we are put in a position to fight against each other for dollars that continue to shrink.

The impact goes beyond residents. Community-based non-profits represent approximately 14% of Connecticut’s workforce. Our staff often work at below living wage and most need to work 2 or 3 jobs to support their family. At a time when the economic stimulus is necessary to the long-term welfare of our state, these individuals are not able to participate in the growing economy. They are rarely able to purchase goods and services or buy a home. These purchases are essential to provide much needed income to municipalities and the state. Even worse, our staff often have to resort to state assistance such as food stamps or Husky. Single heads of household, many of them women of color, are impacted the highest.

Unlike most for-profits that can raise prices or cut expenses without impacting the health and wellbeing of people, we have few options. When our funding is cut our options are to lay off staff and cut programs.
At a time when Connecticut leads in opioid deaths and our ranking as one of the top states for mental health and addiction services continues to drop. Continued erosion of the system of care will continue to cost us – in lives and dollars. With less access to community-based services, the higher cost option – and not always the right option depending on the experience of the individual – is inpatient care.

I am asking that you join us and other nonprofits across CT to fight to make funding for health and human services fixed costs in the budget. And, also I urge you to support proposals to shift more expensive state-operated programs into the community.

As you know from the countless testimonies from people who receive services, community-based programs work to improve their quality of life, keep them on a path to wellness, ensure they are engaged in their community, and, for many, get them back to work or school.

More cuts means that the quality of life in Connecticut will not improve. People will not have access to the services that will improve the health and wellbeing of our friends and neighbors. Jobs will be lost and organizations that are indispensable to many will fold.

Community-based services cost less. They work. Please ensure that community-based services are essential.

Thank you for your time and for your service,

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President and CEO