March 1, 2019
To: Appropriations Committee, Health Subcommittee
From: Gary Wallace, Gilead Community Services Board Chairman, Captain, Middletown Police Department
RE: Funding for Mental Health Services

Good Evening Senators Osten & Formica, Representatives Walker & Lavielle, and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for accepting this testimony and for your anticipated consideration for adequate funding for mental health services in CT.

Long before I knew anything about Gilead Community Services or the Middletown Police Department, I learned a little bit about clients who suffered from mental illness from my neighbor who worked for DHMAS. I was a young boy growing up in East Hampton, CT on Hayes Road. My parents had a large garden in the back yard and as children, my sister and I gained plenty of gardening experience, even when we didn’t want it! Our next door neighbors, the Corson’s, had a large garden too. Each year, my father and I would till the soil and use the compost to enrich it. Our next door neighbors would do the same as our gardens bordered each other’s. We spent long hours out there talking about vegetables and how to harvest them.

In those summer months, Mr. Corson would often bring home guests on Saturdays to help out in the garden. I recall my sister and I talking about the men who visited because they seemed “different”. One day I asked my father about them and wanted to know who they were. It was at that exact point in my life that my perception of people suffering from mental illnesses would change. My father took me by the hand and walked me into the neighbors yard to introduce me to the men. They were nice and very knowledgeable. From that day on, we all worked together on weekends in both gardens. We told stories and laughed about many different things. Through the guidance of my parents and the Corsons, we learned about mental illness in a way that would carry us through life. They gave us the understanding and the opportunity to learn and love. It truly paid off.

Fast forward to the Middletown Police Department. For my first 17 years of service as a police officer, having worked in numerous capacities and ranks, I served with other officers responding to calls for service involving people with mental illness. We have always been very well versed with crisis intervention and routinely managed these situations often ending with a person being shipped off to the local hospital for an evaluation. And then I met Gilead. An agency that serves a population of people in need that just want to live their best lives. People who do not want to be labeled as being ill or stand out in a crowd as someone to be feared. I cannot speak for every officer, but I can say that on average, police officers want to see citizens, all citizens, live free and prosper. We work hard to build trust and relationships over time and this is something rarely seen that happens every day.
As the chairman of the Gilead board, I have continued to partner with other board members and my officers to visit Gilead programs in the community. These meet and greet visits have benefited everyone tremendously. Staff and clients get to personally know board members and officers where opportunities to talk in a non crisis setting has been wonderful. These relationships would never happen if clients were not out in the community enjoying the deserved quality of life that awaits them. It would be so easy to write them off and prefer that they be in the states care. Our efforts would be channeled toward other issues in the community. But that is the wrong attitude. The cost to care for clients in the private sector is much less that utilizing state care. Building relationships with people that we would not normally build them with is also key.

We welcome the opportunity to serve all people of all walks. And even when situations become worthy of our presence to keep the peace, we can find the good in those situations and make the best out of them.

Thank you again for any consideration and thank you for all that you do for CT. My dual role in the community, as well as my upbringing, in part, has helped me understand that people with mental illness who can manage a normal life with help should have the opportunity to flourish and be productive citizens.

Gary Wallace

Chairman, Board of Directors
Gilead Community Services

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