Testimony on behalf of the CT Prevention Network
Before the Appropriations Committee March 1, 2019
HB: 7148: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFORE

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

My name is Pamela Mautte and I am testifying as the President of the CT Prevention Network (CPN). CPN is the coalition of the five Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations who are focused on substance abuse and mental health prevention efforts and work with all of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

The Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (RBHAO) were created through DMHAS in response to elimination of funding from the State budget for the former Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards. Previously, RACs and RMHBs were legislatively enacted bodies with funding appropriated by the legislature. The legislature funded both Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards up until Fiscal Year 2018. The October 2017 bipartisan budget included funding for both RACs and RMHBs within the DMHAS budget. Nevertheless, Governor Malloy used the authority, granted to him by the legislature, to eliminate all funding for these entities. DMHAS then moved forward with a Request for Proposal that consolidated the 13 RACs and 5 RMHBs into 5 RBHAOs. In February 2018, five Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (RBHAO) were awarded through a competitive Request for Proposal Process. The funding each agency receives is now provided through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grant provided through the federal government.

We appreciate and support DMHAS with developing the RBHAO’s to increase efficiencies and integrate mental health and substance abuse services provided by the former RACs and RMHBs. However, as a whole, the state budget has never prioritized prevention efforts such as ours. The current budget continues to neglect prevention funding and the importance that prevention funding can have on health outcomes and health costs. We know that for every $1 spent on prevention, we save between $7 and $31 in other costs. Somehow this research continues to elude decision makers, who should be keyed in on savings to our state budget.

In order to support the RBHAO endeavor, state dollars should be allocated to create a long-term plan for effecting community level change and sustaining these efforts. In these unprecedented times in which the legislature is debating issues like sports betting, marijuana legalization, increasing taxes on
tobacco /vaping while working with us to end both the opioid and vaping epidemics, we must invest in prevention. The Connecticut Prevention Network (CPN) is focused on the larger issues of prevention and ensuring that there is proper funding and programming throughout the entire state of Connecticut. There should be a greater focus on prevention funding and dedicated lines of funding from each of the following as the legislature looks to gambling expansion, marijuana legalization, and tobacco taxation.

We understand the difficult budget challenges and need for new revenue streams. In conclusion, we ask that you maintain funding for DMHAS and strongly consider funding prevention, especially dedicated streams from tobacco taxes, legalized marijuana and expended gambling. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pamela A. Mautte
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President CPN