My name is Nicole Reynolds and I am a lifelong resident of Connecticut. I work as the Development Director for Reliance Health, Inc. located in Norwich, where I also reside. I am submitting written testimony to comment on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor. I urge you to recognize the significant role community nonprofits make in improving quality of life for all Connecticut residents and ask that you please protect and fully fund these essential services.

I have worked for Reliance Health, Inc for the past 13 years. Reliance Health is nonprofit community mental health center with over 30 programs designed to provide supportive services to those living with mental health barriers. At Reliance Health we strive to enhance health through mental wellness for those we serve, as well as the greater community. Last year, we served over 1,000 individuals with the support of nearly 260 staff. Through residential programing, community support, homeless outreach, individual and group therapy, medication management, social rehab, and a harm reduction approach, we are providing services to community members at a significant cost savings to the state of Connecticut.

Despite our long-standing history of providing affordable, high quality mental health services, we continue to see cuts to funding, or remain flat funded. Cost of living has increased, cost of service delivery has increased, cost to do business has increased, yet nonprofits are left with an unmanageable burden of doing more for less. At time when taking care of one’s mental health is becoming more and more accepted; these budget difficulties have caused mental services to become less and less accessible. We have more people coming in the door than we can physically serve. Our programs are burdened by an increased need that we cannot meet. People who need help are being told to wait or can only be provided with limited support. This does not improve quality of life for the residents of Connecticut, but instead increases visits to the emergency department, crime, homelessness, substance abuse, and death.

Nonprofits are dependent on the State for funding and have limited options in the face of budget shortfalls. We can’t raise taxes or charges. This is a model that cannot sustain itself – and it puts Connecticut’s quality-of-life at risk. I am asking you to maximize limited state funding by shifting more expensive state-operated programs into the community. The State must decide: either keep the expensive status quo and serve fewer people or change the system and serve more people in need. Community nonprofits can reduce state costs and meet the demand for services if you first take the necessary steps.

I appreciate your time and hope that you will keep nonprofit services in mind when discussing H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor. Please recognize the significant role community nonprofits make in improving quality of life for all Connecticut residents and please protect and fully fund these essential services.

Sincerely,

Nicole Reynolds – Norwich, CT
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