Testimony 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 THEREFOR.

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mike Doyle and I am a registered voter in Norwich.

I am here to testify regarding HB 7148 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

I am here today to support and preserve the proposed DMHAS grant funding for substance abuse and mental health services. In my capacity as the Director at Penobscot Place, a recovery-based clubhouse for individuals with co-occurring diagnoses for substance use disorders and mental illness offered within Reliance Health (formerly Reliance House), I see the direct impact this funding has on the individuals who use our services as well as the community they live in. I have also experienced the extreme impact reducing these funds in recent years has had on Norwich, a community hit extremely hard by the Opioid Epidemic evidenced by 34 overdose deaths in 2017. In a town of just over 40,000 people, that is an enormous number. Reliance Health, thankfully, is a very robust and forward-thinking organization and we were able to continue to provide quality services through these cuts despite losing valuable staff and programming as a result.

In 2018, Reliance Health and the city of Norwich allocated resources to shift our focus toward a peer-based recovery coach program known as the Coordinated Addiction Recovery System or CARS. The CARS program is a collaboration within the town which links those looking for addiction recovery support with recovery coaches to be that “missing link” in the recovery process. The CARS program, for which I have the absolute privilege of overseeing, also partners with the United Way 2-1-1 Information Line giving anyone in the Norwich area access to CARS and a living, breathing Recovery Coach by simply dialing 2-1-1 any time of the day or night. This program has operated since August and roughly 70% of the 50+ people we have worked with have been successfully connected with some form of treatment, and the number of overdose deaths has decreased over 30% in 2018. That said, I urge you to preserve the current funding and consider adding more funding for community-based peer recovery programs as these valuable services are not possible without the funding.

I come to you today not only as a human services professional, but also as a person in long-term recovery. I have had my own struggles with alcoholism and depression in my life; struggles that cost me relationships, jobs, trust, credibility and very nearly ruined a promising military career. Thankfully, I was guided by others that also struggled with addiction and received counseling services through Veterans Affairs when I needed the help. Because of this, I am in my 20th year of sobriety and I know I could not possibly have done it without the help I received... nor can the people I serve today. Thank you for your time and for letting me share my story.