

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.

Jeffrey Santo

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

My name is Jeffrey Santo, and I am a resident of Norwalk. I am a person living with depression, PTSD, and generalized anxiety disorder. I have come before you today to talk about the budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

In an April 2018 article, the Connecticut Mirror reported a cost of \$567,000 a year for each patient treated at the Connecticut Valley Hospital. At the time of this Article's publication, they reported 87 patients were receiving treatment at Whiting. If Whiting has an average of 80 patients a year, the State of Connecticut is paying over 45 million dollars annually.

My question is what does a patient get for a half million dollars in services? Are you abused like William Shehadi, a man whose story led to the arrest of ten members of the treatment staff and another 37 of them put on administrative leave? Are you forcibly placed into restraints as you choke to death with a cookie lodged in your throat? That is Andrew Vermiglio's tragic story. At this point, it would be extremely difficult for you to convince me that the high cost is related to the quality of care especially since I too was once a patient there.

We cannot continue down this path and expect anything to change in the future. We must find new and cost-effective methods to treat those living with mental illness. I believe this will happen when there is more collaboration between treatment recipients and their providers. What if we found an alternative treatment for just one patient at CVH? \$567,000? The state could hire 12 Recovery Support Specialists full time at \$22 an hour for a year.

DMHAS should focus on prevention, treatment, and recovery equally. Money used to focus on prevention would be directly fighting the opioid epidemic and the high rate of suicide. In a recent Hartford Courant report, we learned of a clinician with 19 years of service at CVH who had taken their own life at the hospital. This was a person surrounded by mental health professionals trained in noticing the signs of someone experiencing suicidal ideations.

Why is prevention so important to me? I was lucky enough to survive my attempt, and not everyone gets a second chance. On average we lose 16 veterans and 4 active duty personnel or reservists a day. It is estimated that there are two suicide attempts per secondary school per year in the United States. There are over 37,000 secondary schools in our country. Lastly, a 2017 study revealed that police officers and firefighters are more likely to die by suicide than to die in the line of duty.

The choices we make about mental health today will ultimately determine how much we pay tomorrow. Thank you for your time and for listening to my testimony today.