Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
March 1, 2019

HB 7148: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

James Fazio

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is James Fazio and I am a registered voter in the town of Windsor, Connecticut. I am here to testify regarding HB 7148- AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

The proposed DMHAS budget cuts would have a direct impact on mental health services. I work for Community Health Resources (CHR) as a cook at a clubhouse for persons with psychiatric disabilities. My job is to run the culinary unit. The members and I prepare nutritious lunches for the members at reduced cost. CHR receives funding from DMHAS. I understand that DMHAS grants for mental health and addiction services are again being reduced by $2 million. Many clients of CHR suffer from severe and persistent mental illness as well as drug addiction. They rely on CHR for not only medications and food, but also for programs and activities that promote mental, physical and emotional wellbeing.

Our State is making progress to end homelessness- saving lives and public dollars. These funds should be restored to FY2017 levels ($24.2 million). State investments in supportive housing services allow us to continue our progress on chronic homelessness (long-term homelessness with a severe disability). These services are a critical component in keeping these high-need individuals housed and stable. These services are funded from the Housing Supports and Services line item, which is maintained at $23 million in the Governor's proposed budget. Please maintain these critical support services for permanent supportive housing.
I am also secretary for one of the Catchment Area Councils that served the North Central Regional Mental Health Board, which is now consolidated into one of the new Regional Behavioral Health Organizations (RBHAO's). This was done to combine oversight of both mental health services and substance use services into one organization. There is still no line item for the RBHAO's, so that funding is now entirely dependent on federal dollars. These organizations conduct on-site surveys, promote public awareness and advocacy, facilitate best practices and help consumers of mental health and substance use services get connected with needed services. I urge the State of Connecticut to support the DMHAS budget and continue helping these most vulnerable persons meet their needs and remain in good health.