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

Senator Osten, Representative Toni Walker, and respective members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Michaela I. Fissel. I live and vote in Windsor, Connecticut where I serve on my local Board of Education and am an active member of my children’s school community.

I am here today to testify with general support of the Governor's proposed budget, specifically the DMHAS budget. However, I do ask that you reconsider the reduction of $250,000 from the DMHAS Young Adult Services and the proposed privatization of residential programming available through state operated young adult service programs.

As a survivor of childhood sexual trauma, with experiences as a runaway youth who spent many years homelessness, using drugs, getting caught up with the criminal justice system, subsequent poverty and an unplanned pregnancy - I can attest to the importance of early interventions and tailored supports to assist young people navigate who they are after trauma.

Based on results of the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) approximately ¼ of young adults ages 18-25 experience mental health challenges through the year;¹ while, it is widely recognized fact that nearly ¼ of chronic, lifetime, mental health disabilities are diagnosed by the age of 24.²

It is critically important that funding for DMHAS Young Adult Services remains intact, and residential services are maintained as state operated.

Currently, the DMHAS Young Adult Services Division provides comprehensive mental health and addiction services to nearly 1,800 young adults who are described as having significant and persistent serious mental illness. These services are noted across the country for their innovative and progressive approach to meeting the developmental needs of young adults with mental health and addiction challenges.³

Tailored young adult services, such as those offered through DMHAS YAS, have the potential to derail the trajectory of chronic and debilitating dependence on high-cost and largely ineffective acute psychiatric treatment. While, we also know that early intervention can reduce involvement with other systems, including incarceration and the probate court. In a recent study, researchers from University of Massachusetts noted that young adults can get back on track to transition to adulthood successfully with appropriate orientation.⁴

(Davis and Muson, 2018)

When taking up the challenge of fiscal responsibility, I ask that you explore the rising costs of administrative overhead, contractual obligations through annualized raises and overtime pay, along with the additional $5 million to the Managed Service System. I ask that you consider your return on investment. Take time to look at the outcomes associated with the services rendered, and prioritize services that reduce the economic burden of mental health challenges or CT residents.

Fundamentally, there is a need to reconsider the basic assumption that our system was designed around the belief that people who experience mental health challenges are disabled and will be dependent on services for the rest of their lives. This assumption directly contradicts the possibility of recovery and makes it impossible to decrease dependence on mental health care.

DMHAS Young Adult Services offers a window of opportunity for derailing chronic mental health challenges, so the emerging generation of young people can get back on track to transition to adulthood successfully with their generational cohort.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and I am available if you are interested in learning more about young adults as a behavioral health service population.

Respectfully,

Michaela I. Fissel

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I am the current Assistant Executive Director at Advocacy Unlimited, Inc., which is a statewide, peer-run, organization that is dedicated to improving the wellbeing and overall outcomes for individuals who experience mental health and co-occurring disorders (www.advocacyunlimited.org). In addition, for the past decade I have studied emerging adults as a behavioral health service population within Connecticut while completing my post-secondary education and graduate studies. For more information about the work we do, or for further reading, I am available at mfissel@advocacyunlimited.org