Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021.

My name is John Dixon and I am the President and CEO of Bridges Healthcare. I am also a third generation CT resident with 2 more generations of my family following the same path. I am proud of being part of a 5 generation CT family.

Bridges is a non-profit agency that has provided effective and necessary mental health and substance abuse treatment and prevention services to CT residents for the past 62 years. We are the lead mental health agency for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for the Milford/Orange/West Haven area. In addition, Bridges provides community based and in-home services in 6 towns in the Naugatuck Valley – touching the lives of over 9000 adults, children and families on an annual basis. Bridges relies on direct funding from state agencies for approximately 60% of its overall budget. These funds are necessary to fill in the gaps not covered through insurance and that allow for people in need to receive essential mental health, substance abuse and primary care services in the community - thereby improving outcomes and decreasing overall health costs.

I am grateful for the opportunity to talk with you about two pressing issues that affect Bridges and the people and communities we serve. The first is that I ask you to continue to consider and actively take steps towards converting existing state provided services to the non-profit sector. Non-profit agencies like Bridges – with long histories of being both leading community providers and employers, are locally based and thus have close ties and know communities and their resources well. This allows people served to benefit from and become meaningfully integrated into their communities. Non-profit agencies’ services are also more cost efficient and effective – thereby aiding the state during this current budget cycle/crisis.

Second – I would ask you to protect and fully fund mental health and substance abuse services in this budget. Bridges has experienced cuts over the last several years that have impacted its continued ability to meet the needs of our communities. Last year Bridges and other like agencies had the DMHAS portion of our budget reduced by 5%. A plan was subsequently put in place to restore approximately 1% of that lost funding. We recently learned that this restoration has been cut – leaving our agency with an unplanned for $44k deficit for this current fiscal year. To put the impact of this into perspective, Bridges – through the support of DMHAS, DPH and the communities of Milford and West Haven – is currently expanding its opioid Medication Assisted Treatment work to include the 4th of its kind in the nation – mobile treatment option. We will be creatively addressing a national epidemic and thoughtfully engaging a difficult-to-engage population by initiating and providing Suboxone therapy where people live and frequent. A Recovery Coach – a staff person with lived experience – is essential to this model by credibly reaching out to people in need to fight through the obstacles and challenges addiction causes and to receive treatment that allows them to live, succeed and grow. It costs an agency like Bridges approximately $44,000 total to hire a Recovery Coach. So please consider what that 1% means and what our communities would look like without such services.
Thank you for your time.