

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**  
**February 21, 2020**  
**DMHAS BUDGET HEARING**  
**H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021**  
**Jeffrey Santo, RSS**

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

My name is Jeffrey Santo, and I am a registered voter in the city of Norwalk. I am here to testify regarding H.B. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.

I could tell you today about how past budget cuts have affected me personally, but I am here to share my experiences with the hope it will positively affect our entire statewide community. Since I live with depression and still experience suicidal thoughts and ideations on a very regular basis, I have needed to learn coping skills throughout my recovery that works for me. Becoming a Certified Recovery Support Specialist was a huge step and opened my eyes to a wide range of problems that other people face every day. Many of these obstacles include such as finding accessible mental health providers, addiction treatment and support services, housing, employment, transportation assistance, and some basic material needs that are out of reach for them.

With this in mind, I created a website called [RockingRecovery.org](http://RockingRecovery.org). In our CT RESOURCE LINKS section, we currently provide connections to over 960 unique resource links that lead to over 1,440 programs, services, and information. The goal of this site is to help people find resources throughout Connecticut quickly and efficiently. The reason I mention any of this is we try to vet every agency, service, and program we list on the site. Whether it's a full-service mental health inpatient facility or a soup kitchen, we don't want to generate dead ends for people seeking help.

Since the site's launch in May, I have made over 300 phone calls to verify that they are still offering all of the services listed on their websites and that the description of their services is accurate. Many conversations along the way has brought an all too familiar story into focus. Service availability has become more limited, and waiting lists are getting longer. Some programs have been merged, their focus narrowed or just eliminated entirely. Some agencies have lost valuable employees due to past budget cuts or new budgets that remain flat. The environment in which they are working forces them to do more with less, and some have not seen a raise since these cuts started ten years ago.

Even with everyone who came to testify here today, it is unlikely we can paint a complete picture of how past budget cuts have impacted all those receiving DMHAS services. It is also fair to say that even with added resources, we would still be facing an uphill battle. A battle on multiple fronts that include the suicide rate among young adults, the rise of drug overdoses, the opioid crisis, vaping, and meeting the demand for peer addiction recovery groups.

Many things in this world influence our mental health and overall wellbeing. It is true; we do not have the power to make the world a perfect place, but we do have the ability to help others find stable footing within it. Every dollar added to the DMHAS budget is another step in the right direction, and every resource we can offer creates a better community for everyone living in our state.

Thank you for listening to my testimony this evening and providing this forum for all of our voices to be heard.

