

MARCH 25, 2021
Human Services Committee
Public Hearing on:
H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Berthel, Representative Case and members of the Human Services Committee:

I am Emily Morrison, Director of Development at United Services, Inc.

United Services is the Local Mental Health Authority for 21 towns in Northeastern Connecticut. We are a nonprofit organization providing more than 30 programs to our community, including Outpatient Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment, Family Programs, and Crisis Services.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding.**

United Services has remained open throughout the pandemic. Our staff have continued to work with clients to support them where they really need us, in the community. This has required creativity from our staff and from us as an agency. We have had to supply our staff with PPE, launch telehealth, supply staff with new equipment for this transition, design and install physical barriers and much more in the last year to keep our programs running in a safe way, and all of these activities greatly increased our costs.

We are also responding to a community need that has risen exponentially in the last year. COVID has greatly impacted our mental and behavioral health and United Services is seeing much higher rates of depression, anxiety and substance use in the population. Some of our programs are currently operating at a more than 200 percent increase in services over the previous year.

Through the American Rescue Plan, Connecticut is set to receive a significant increase in federal matching funds for Medicaid. But the state is not planning to use these funds to increase rates or otherwise compensate providers.

The General Assembly can help us in meeting the community need – which we have seen skyrocket due to COVID-19 – by using the federal Medicaid increase as it is intended - to pay providers who are delivering these services to vulnerable populations.

As you may know, community nonprofits have **requested that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over the next five years for community nonprofits.** Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. COVID-19 has only exacerbated these underfunding challenges.

Because a substantial portion of the \$461 million restoration for community nonprofits will be to provide increased Medicaid rates, the **enhanced FMAP is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Connecticut General Assembly to address these needs.** This influx of federal funding combined with the

state's strong Rainy Day Fund, and more than \$400 million in unexpended Medicaid funds, puts the state in the unique position to use those funds to directly support nonprofit programs and fulfill their needs without complicating the state budget process.

United Services has worked toward Creating Healthy Communities in northeastern Connecticut for more than 55 years. We are dedicated to improving and saving lives, and our work helps the state to reduce healthcare and social service system costs.

Congress intended for the American Rescue Plan to help Americans across the country get to the other side of COVID-19. Please help us to ensure that residents of northeastern Connecticut have those same opportunities.

We urge the Committee to support H.B. 6636.