

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6600

AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR REGIONAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Title: ACTION ORGANIZATIONS.

Vote Date: 3/3/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 2/22/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (RBHAOs) serve as a liaison between the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DHMAS) and local prevention councils at the municipal level. There are five RBHAO regions that serve as strategic partners to prevention councils providing services such as information, coordinated data collection and the administration of grants prevention, treatment and recovery. The needs related to mental health and substance abuse use only continue to grow, particularly among our youth. The demand for such services has increased significantly since the pandemic.

This bill would appropriate \$1 million dollars to DHMAS for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 to fund the five RBHAOs in our state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kathleen Flaherty, Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Project:

Ms. Flaherty provided background regarding the establishment of RBHAOs. Initially, these boards were formed to provide feedback to DHMAS about mental health. There were also 13 regional action councils (RACs) focused on substance abuse and prevention. When funding was cut to DHMAS, the department consolidated the RACs into RBHAOs with less money to

provide these services. Currently, with the legalization of cannabis, online gambling and the increase in mental health issues from COVID, the services of the RBHAOs are needed more than ever. Ms. Flaherty urged the committee to support the increased funding in this bill.

Giovanna Mozzo, Director, The HUB, RBHAO Region 1:

Ms. Mozzo pointed out that funding for RBHAOs has not change since 2018 yet the prevention needs of our state and local communities continue to change -rapidly. RBHAOs have deep roots in each region they serve and if given adequate funding, we would have the ability to address new emerging issues and assist communities with ever increasing unique needs.

Melissa McGarry, Parent, Preventionist and Volunteer in a council supported by the HUB, RBHAO Region 1:

In her testimony, Ms. McGarry shared the critical role played by the HUB in community planning across a wide range of behavioral health topics such as mental health services, substance abuse prevention, harm reduction around alcohol, cannabis, vaping and opioids, gambling awareness and suicide prevention. The RBHAOs are asked to do so much with too little funding. Please pass HB 6600.

Thomas Burr, Affiliates Relations Manager, National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI):

Mr. Burr shared that NAMI has a long history of partnering with the RBHAOs and highly values the services they provide. NAMI often refers people to RBHAOs who want accurate unbiased information regarding their region's behavioral health infrastructure. NAMI also believes that the prevention activities of the RBHAOs have made a significant impact on the level of behavioral health issues occurring in the state's overall population. Mr. Burr added that due to the recent introduction of legalized marijuana and online gambling, the education and prevention goals of the RBHAOs are more important than ever. Our state's younger citizens were particularly impacted during the pandemic with significant increases in suicide, substance abuse and opioid poisoning. Now, more than ever, RBHAOs should be fully funded.

Allyson Nadeau, Executive Director, Amplify, the RBHAO Region 4:

Ms. Nadeau noted that the RBHAOs are currently funded solely through federal block grants and funding does not align with the increase demand for RBHAO support within our communities. Lack of state dollars limits our ability to meet the needs of local communities. This bill would help to prioritize prevention efforts and have a positive impact to advance the health of our communities.

Allison Behnke, Prevention Coordinator, Lyme Youth Service Bureau:

Ms. Behnke pointed out that substance abuse programs are an essential part of youth support, empowerment and education. The Lyme local RBHAO supports our organization and its efforts through technical knowledge, training and evaluation support to our organization and staff. She urges the committee to approve this essential funding as RBHAOs are a critical piece of the "Prevention Puzzle".

Additional testimony in support of this legislation was received from 35 organizations supported by the RBHAOs.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza

Date: 3/16/2023