

January 29, 2013

**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WORKING GROUP  
BI-PARTISAN TASK FORCE**

Good afternoon. I am Alyssa Goduti, the Vice President for Business Development and Communications at CHR (Community Health Resources.) CHR is a leading behavioral health provider in Central and Eastern Connecticut, offering a wide range of services including mental healthcare for children, adults and families, substance use services, child welfare and supportive housing. We serve 11,000 individuals every year through our 80 programs and more than 600 staff. We believe that real life brings with it real challenges and it is our role to help people find real hope for overcoming those challenges.

Community providers are the backbone of Connecticut's human service system, supporting over 500,000 people a year. For years, community based providers have collaborated with the state to ensure that critical services are provided in a manner that is accessible and affordable, yet maintains the highest standards of quality. To understand the importance of our services to the health of our communities it is important to know some basic facts:

- By 2020, behavioral health disorders will surpass all physical diseases world-wide as major cause of disability.
- Mood disorders rank 1st in work loss costs; & are the most common reason for going on social security disability
- On average, people with serious mental illness have a lifespan that is shortened by 25 years.

CHR, and other community providers are in the business of preventing crisis every day. We work to keep people safe, address their mental health needs early on, and respond to emergencies so that people get help before their illness cause them to do harm to themselves or others. We provide treatment so that people can find hope for the future. We have countless stories of how we make a difference. For example, our staff recently spearheaded a crisis response that prevented what could have been a major workplace violence situation. We received a call from a family member of a man who was in crisis. He was depressed, angry, and had threatened harm to himself and others. He focused his frustration on his employer and co-workers. The family was concerned that he was intent on doing harm at his workplace. Through their experience, community connections and clinical expertise, our staff was able to coordinate with law enforcement, de-escalate the situation and engage him in proper clinical treatment. They prevented what could have been a terrible crisis. This kind heroism happens every day and is truly what makes the community provider system the "safety net."

Unfortunately, we can't address every individual who needs help. However, we do need to break down barriers that keep people from seeking treatment. Research shows that 20% of adults in the U.S. suffered from a diagnosable mental illness in the past year. Unfortunately, less than half of those individuals receive treatment. This is ironic because we know that:

- Behavioral health is essential to physical health
- Prevention and early intervention are possible and necessary
- Treatment is effective

- People recover when they have the right help to get them there

In difficult fiscal times, demand for our services grows. People lose their jobs, have more challenges with their families and turn to agencies like CHR for support. In addition to expected demand growth and reduced resources, federal health care reform will add approximately 150,000 residents to the State Medicaid rolls, most of whom will seek services from nonprofit community-based providers. Prior to FY2013, we have had no COLA for 4 years, while costs of providing services have increased significantly.

Community providers have been under funded for more than 20 years. By every objective measure, budget increases to help our clients have failed to keep pace with inflation. It's not even close. While the Consumer Price Index has risen by nearly 98% in the last twenty five years, cost of service increases for community providers have only gone up by about 33%. This disparity is placing increasing strain on our budgets and ultimately our clients – your constituents. It is imperative that the safety net of community-based services is preserved and strengthened so that we can meet growing needs, provide ready access to care and work to breakdown stigma that keeps people from seeking help.

Thank you for your time and attention.