
NORTHWEST REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH BOARD, INC.

Central Naugatuck Valley Catchment Area Council #20
Housatonic Mental Health Catchment Area Council #21
Northwest Mental Health Catchment Area Council #22

969 WEST MAIN ST., Suite 1B
WATERBURY, CONNECTICUT 06708
TEL./FAX (203) 757-9603
isw@nwrmb-ct.org website: www.nwrmb.org

Testimony before the Mental Health Subcommittee
By Janine Sullivan-Wiley
Executive Director, Northwest Regional Mental Health Board, Inc.
January 29, 2013

Good day to Sen. Toni Harp and Rep. Terrie Wood, and all of the legislators gathered here today. Thank you for your willingness to listen to our voices. **Thank you for your time and attention.**

My name is Janine Sullivan-Wiley, and I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Regional Mental Health Board. Most if not all of you know what the Regional Boards are, and what we do. We represent the grassroots and all of the stakeholders of mental health and substance abuse services. We conduct evaluations and assess both the unmet needs for behavioral health services in our communities. We work to address stigma against people with behavioral health disorders, noting that stigma is a barrier to treatment and recovery.

Sandy Hook is in our region. It has had a profound effect on so many there - the children, families and educators in the elementary school which experienced that unspeakable tragedy. It also affected every person in that town, and in the surrounding communities. It was not like the ripples from a rock thrown in a pond, but an emotional tsunami that has swept through everything. It has also swept through the lives of all persons in Connecticut, and this country. It has swept through the lives of all people with mental illness and their families. It continues to rush on, leaving damage in its wake.



I am concerned today with unnecessary harm as a result, and maybe some increased hope.

My hope: that this event will help to – finally – bring about the investment in support and treatment that will help every family, child and adult get the help they need, without fear or shame.

As I mentioned, part of our legislative mandate is to conduct needs assessment. Here is some of what we have found:

Right now, we have people who are seeking the help and support that they need to recover – and they can't get it.

- There are waiting lists for outpatient treatment. This is a resource issue.
- People find themselves on spend-downs with Medicaid, and cannot get the medications they need and count on for wellness. This is a policy issue.
- There is a chronic shortage of psychiatrists – a workforce issue.
- The programs that provide safety and security in the non-profit sector are stressed and stretched from years of chronic underfunding. Having spent years doing more with what is effectively less, they have had to gradually reduce staff and hours of operation. Even the state-operated services are now stretched and operating with many staff vacancies. They just don't have the capacity to do what they want to do and need to do. This is also a resource issue.

You have heard this before, I know. **It is real.**

I have seen the suggestion of instituting Involuntary Outpatient treatment. That doesn't work. I know you will hear the research and statistics from others, so I won't repeat them here.

But there is great and tragic irony that making treatment involuntary is being considered when the *treatment and supports that people are seeking are not there*. That is a matter of resource allocation, policy and political will.

I am asking you to follow this tragic event, and the emotional tsunami that resulted, with decisions that foster hope and enable people with behavioral health issues to recover.

Please, support a robust service system. Please don't place barriers to treatment and recovery. Please support prevention, early intervention and young adult services divert people from needing later, more intensive supports.

People just need a bridge so that they can each recovery – and you can help that bridge to be strong and supportive.

Thank you.

