
For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021. I'm writing to you as the Executive Director a small nonprofit, Central Naugatuck Valley HELP, Inc., located in Waterbury, Danbury and Torrington and serving individuals with substance use and/or mental health disorders. This agency has worked tirelessly for fifty (50) years to meet the needs of some of the most disenfranchised citizens of these cities. We have been honored to do so.

Our agency, along with many others, is struggling to survive in 2020 due to the following factors:

- * Funding for behavioral health has been cut, even as demand increased
 - o Since Fiscal Year 2013, grant funding for substance abuse services has been cut by 29%.
 - o From 2013 to 2017, opioid-related overdose deaths increased from 417 in 2013 to a record high 1,200 in 2019.
- * Medicaid rates do not cover the cost of care
 - o Community providers operate at a loss for nearly every service. In 2015, the annual loss for the top ten procedures by volume was more than \$27 million for approximately 250,000 service hours. With inadequate reimbursement rates, the State not only fails to maximize its federal matching funds, it risks the provision of some of the most highly utilized, critical behavioral health services.

At our agency, we have had to significantly reduce benefits provided to employees. Just this year, employee contributions to health insurance has doubled! The agency cost to continue to provide this insurance increased significantly, as well. It is increasingly difficult to attract and to retain qualified employees to provide services. Eight out of ten applicants will not even come in for an interview, due to the salary being too low. The agency is forced to consider decreasing the staffing in each of our four (4) residential programs in order to provide a salary increase. To do so is a torturous decision, as a decrease in staffing levels for these programs serving individuals who are severely impaired will affect the quality of services and safety for the residents. It is my hope that this state will prioritize people over other issues in the state budget. For far too many of our clients with opiate use disorders, the quality of care they receive may be the difference between life and death.

Please help us this year. Only you have the power to do so. I greatly appreciate your attention to this matter and the difficulties you face while making your decisions.

Roberta Murtagh, Executive Director
CNV HELP, Inc.
900 Watertown Ave.
Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 756-8984 x1103