



Public Hearing on:

H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

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

My name is Beth Fisher and I am the Executive Director for Kuhn Employment Opportunities, Inc., a nonprofit, social services organization based in Meriden and Middletown. Our agency contracts with both DMHAS and DDS to provide employment and day support services to individuals living with mental illness and/ or intellectual disabilities. We serve approximately 400 individuals throughout Central Connecticut each year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021,

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. They are what make Connecticut a great place to live and work.

I am here to respectfully **request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over 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. Please:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2025;
2. Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2021, a 7% increase;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

With regard to the DMHAS budget, 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.

In FY '17, our agency saw cuts to our DMHAS-funded employment services in Meriden and Middletown; 20% and 15% respectively. This translated to the loss of services for seventy (70) individuals living with mental illness in our community. In FY'18, we faced an additional 5 % cut to our Middletown DMHAS-funded employment services. While we have since been able to restore services for twenty (20) of the seventy (70) program slots lost, and saw a 1% restoration, the need remains significantly greater than funding allows.

Specific to DDS-funded services, our agency (and others) face ongoing unfunded mandates that challenge nonprofit, community-based providers to make ends meet. Therefore, I urge you to:

- Please support the Governor’s proposal in the DSS and DDS budgets to create an incentive payment model to help move people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities into less intensive and more appropriate levels of care.
 - Please ensure that this new program furthers the creation of a better continuum of care that provides the proper services for everyone who is eligible for them.
 - Please also do not just use the savings it creates to balance the budget, instead taking the opportunity to reinvest that savings into increasing rates and/or moving people off the waiting list.
- Please oppose the Governor’s proposal to cut \$2 million from the Behavioral Support Program. The Governor’s budget says that cut reflects “natural attrition.” If that is the case, the funding should be reinvested to increase rates for those services.

In closing, please keep in mind that nonprofit providers deliver quality services with dedicated staff, receive high marks from State reviews of services and, are cost effective when compared to State delivered services. We are mission driven and committed to the individuals we serve, and deeply connected to the local communities that we serve. Community-based nonprofits can be part of the solution to State budget challenges if you take action to support our request.

Thank you for your time and attention to these issues.

Sincerely,

Beth Fisher
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