

Governor's Proposed Mid-term Budget Adjustments for FY2021
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Friday, February 21, 2020

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

My name is Marcia DuFore and I am a registered voter in the town of Suffield, Connecticut. I am testifying as a private citizen, Executive Director on behalf of the Amplify, Inc., and member of the Connecticut Prevention Coalition (CPN), NAMI and Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP).

I am testifying to encourage investment in the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) budget to sustain behavioral health services, related housing supports and services for high-need individuals in the DMHAS budget.

This is my first year testifying as the Executive Director of Amplify. We are the Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization (RBHAO) charged by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to act as their strategic community partner for planning, education, and advocacy to address behavioral health needs and services for children and adults in North Central Connecticut. Our members include people in recovery, families, providers of behavioral health services, members of coalitions concerned about mental wellness and preventing, treating and responding to substance misuse in our communities. We chose the name Amplify because we want to ensure their voices our heard.

First of all, we want to thank Governor Lamont. This is the first year in quite a while that the proposed budget does not contain cuts to the human and social services net that is so important to our members.

Every year RBHAOs carry out a statewide needs assessment and priority planning process in order to capture regional needs and trends. Information gathered is used to inform the DMHAS Mental Health Block Grant and DMHAS biennial budgeting process as well as the planning and priority setting process for each RBHAO. For a complete summary of the process and associated data sources, please see the full report at: <http://www.amplifyct.org/publications>.

The following is a brief summary of issues and recommendations:

Emerging issues:

- Explosion in use of electronic nicotine devices (ENDs)
- Accidental overdose deaths caused by use of substances laced with Fentanyl
- High rates of anxiety among youth
- Overlap between computer gaming, sports betting, and problem gambling
- Concern over loss of CAC consumer engagement & monitoring roles in new RBHAO structure

Just a few of our recommendations:

- Continue efforts to reduce opioid-related deaths through the promotion of prevention, treatment, and recovery activities for opioid use disorder with a focus on highest-risk communities (including mobile and tele-health options)

- Address gaps in the continuum of care for supportive, supported, and residential housing for individuals with mental health and addiction challenges to prevent rehospitalizations
- Support the role of Catchment Area Councils (CACs) as vital mechanisms for consumer engagement and service monitoring.
- Promote problem gambling awareness and inclusion of problem gambling in recovery coach and recovery support specialist training

I would like to highlight several of issues and recommendations that related to line items in the DMHAS budget and line items missing from the DMHAS budget.

We must continue of efforts to address overdose deaths and related behavioral health concerns that lead to addiction. This requires an investment in the services of community non-profits who have fallen behind the cost of services. The Governor's budget includes:

- Maintenance of Management Service System grants for mental health and addiction services
- Additional funding community private nonprofit providers to reflect the impact of minimum wage increases on their costs.
- Maintenance of Young Adult Service funding

This is only a start. The Governor's budget does not include any state funding for the prevention services offered by RBHAOs. As Connecticut continues to seek increased revenue from legalized on-line gambling and recreational marijuana, a percentage of these revenues must be invested in prevention, treatment, and recovery for the adverse impacts felt by some individuals and our communities. This should include funding for education, research, and prevention of underage drug usage and treatment for addiction as part of any legislation to legalize marijuana in the state.

In addition, we must preserve the role of individuals in recovery and families to share feedback, raise issues, and inform DMHAS about gaps in services and the service system. Support for their role used to be funded and carried out by Regional Mental Health Boards. Support must be sustained in the newly structured RBHAOs and supported by state funds.

As well, housing concerns continues to be one of the top priority issues that impact people seeking recovery from behavioral health challenges in our region. People with mental health and addiction issues face housing discrimination and encounter many barriers to accessing stable, permanent housing. We must address the gaps in the continuum of care for supportive, supported, and residential housing for individuals with mental health and addiction challenges. Unless these gaps are addressed, individuals will continue to cycle through homelessness, hospitalization and incarceration at great cost to the system and their personal well-being. Therefore, we support the following in the DMHAS budget:

- Housing Supports/Services maintained at \$23 million for FY 21.
- \$3 million dollars in new funding to fund community placements for individuals at Connecticut Valley Hospital who are ready for discharge.

Thank you for all you do and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
 Marcia DuFore
 Executive Director, Amplify, Inc.