

**Testimony of Claire Bien**  
**Before the Appropriations Committee**  
**February 21, 2020**  
**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) budget**

**H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING  
JUNE 30, 2021**

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Claire Bien. I am a registered voter in the town of Hamden and work as a research associate at the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health (PRCH). I am a founder and past president of NAMI Elm City and continue my NAMI affiliation as an In Our Own Voice Presenter, and NAMI Provider Trainer, which offers trainings to mental health professionals on the unique perspectives of people with mental health conditions and their families. NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut, and its local affiliates provide support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for individuals, families, and children impacted by mental health conditions. I am also a member of the board of the Hearing Voices Network-USA and facilitate two Hearing Voices support groups in New Haven. And I am a person in long-term recovery from hearing voices.

In past years I have testified about the excellent care I had within the Yale Psychiatric system because I am educated, grew up knowing that I was loved, and had good private insurance. Those gifts allowed me not only to negotiate the terms of my treatment, but also to manage its course, resulting in my ability to achieve and maintain a substantial degree of recovery.

My ability to maintain professional employment since I was first hospitalized in 1983 has been enhanced not only through compassionate psychotherapy, but by the learning, support, and subsequent understanding of self, others, and the world, that I have acquired through my employment and affiliation with many DMHAS-funded nonprofit human services agencies and organizations. The ability to work with amazing colleagues—at Yale PRCH, Advocacy Unlimited, Connecticut Mental Health Center, the Connecticut Hearing Voices Network—and NAMI—has strengthened the foundation on which I have built my recovery and allowed me to take on a larger education and advocacy role. Our collective goal is to establish, once and for all, that serious mental health challenges, even those that many consider intractable and incurable, need not be life sentences. When we are given options in care and treatment, when we are encouraged to consider ourselves an integral part of a team, a community—of professionals—of loving family and loyal friends who are invested in our long-term mental and emotional health, we begin to trust ourselves, and learn to thrive.

I understand the state's continuing fiscal challenges and the difficult decisions facing legislators and I appreciate that the Governor has flat-funded and not significantly cut the DMHAS budget. At the same time, certain state services and supports must be prioritized because of the increasing needs for services and the greater health care and human costs resulting from short-term funding cuts. I am asking you to consider increasing the funding for DMHAS behavioral health services, for related housing supports, and for services for high-need individuals in the DHMAS' budget.

**I support the following items in the Governor's budget proposal:**

- The additional \$280,880 for private nonprofit providers to reflect the impact of minimum wage increases on their costs.
- The Housing Supports/Services maintained at \$23 million for FY 21.
- The \$3 million dollars in new funding to fund community placements for individuals at Connecticut Valley Hospital who are ready for discharge. This funding would support twenty placements during fiscal year 2021. The funding would cover both rental subsidies and funding for wraparound services and supports.
- The Young Adults Services that are maintained at levels of the enacted budget, \$78 million in FY 21.
- The maintaining of the Managed Service System, (Federal) Grants for Substance Abuse Services, and (Federal) Grants for Mental Health Services line items; that all help fund NAMI Connecticut's work. work at NAMI Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Claire Bien  
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