

**Testimony of James and Julianne Pfeifer
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 Senators Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. Our names are James and Julianne Pfeifer, and we are also members of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). 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.

Our son, Jason, has been diagnosed as being Bipolar I with schizoaffective disorder. He attempted to commit suicide in February of 2019 via a car accident and resulting car fire. He was badly burned and spent 13 weeks in the Burn Unit of Bridgeport Hospital before being transferred to the Hospital for Special Care (HFSC) in New Britain where he is still a patient. During his one year of hospitalization Jason has not received the mental health services he needs. Jason has completed the rehabilitation services at the Hospital for Special Care in September of last year. The hospital has been in contact with DMHAS to get Jason into a program or facility where he would get the mental health services he needs. The HFSC attempted to have Jason admitted to Connecticut Valley Hospital. Because he agreed to voluntarily go there and his condition was not viewed as acute, he was given a low priority for being admitted to CVH. The HFSC then contacted a Diversion Nurse who works under contract to DMHAS. She developed a plan to have Jason admitted to an intensive out-patient program at the Institute of Living (IOL). IOL rejected Jason for their out-patient program and recommended he be in an in-patient program. The Diversion Nurse and her Supervisor then contacted CVH to have Jason's admission priority increased such that he will eventually be admitted. As of the date of this testimony Jason remains at HFSC for six months beyond when he needed to be there and where he is not receiving the mental health services he needs.

I understand the state's continuing fiscal challenges and the difficult decisions facing legislators. 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 like our son, Jason, in the DMHAS' 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 at NAMI Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

James and Julianne Pfeifer