

**Testimony of LaShawne Houston Sowell
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, My name is LaShawne Houston Sowell and I am also a member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness(NAMI),Manchester. 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 it's local affiliates provide support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for individuals, families, and children impacted by mental health conditions.

As Mental Health Awareness finally appears to be on the rise, It must be noted that funding to appropriately increase and/or maintain the level of functioning for those living with mental illness aka mental health conditions, should be appropriated with care and compassion. Reports indicate that 1 in 4 persons is living with a mental health condition. This figure may be higher as those are numbers that are based on reported cases.

Instead of retelling my family's story which I have done before at a hearing in front of the public health committee, (It is also now public information), I will just state that Mental Health Services in the State of Connecticut need to be cohesive and effective. Agencies need to talk with one another and services need to be more comprehensive. DMHAS funds many agencies that are doing effective work but on the same token allocates dollars that could be used more effectively elsewhere; i.e. Supportive Housing, Diversion Programs and Training for these services to name a few.

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

*The 3 million dollars in new funding to fund community placements for individuals at Connecticut Valley Hospital and Dutcher Hall (Whiting Forensic) who are ready for discharge.This funding would support twenty placements during the fiscal year 2021.The funding would cover both rental subsidies and funding for wraparound services and supports. I feel more dollars should be allocated towards this effort, I might add.

*The maintaining of the Managed Service System.Grants for Mental Health Services line items; that help fund NAMI Connecticut's work as well as other agencies such as Community Health Resources(CHR) and Advocacy Unlimited to name a few that actually do effective work for those labeled mentally ill.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

LaShawne Houston, LMSW