



**To: Members of the Appropriations Committee**  
**From: Roberta J. Cook, President and CEO**  
**Re: Appropriations Committee Budget Hearings: DMHAS**  
**Date: February 21, 2020**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I thank you for your consideration of my testimony. My name is Roberta Cook and I am the President and CEO of BHcare, one of seven private nonprofit Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHA) in CT dedicated to serving individuals with the most serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

I am writing today in response to H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

Connecticut is experiencing a behavioral health crisis. CT's fatal overdose rate increased by 20% in the last year and is nearly double the national average. Our suicide rate increased by 8.5% since 2015. In the last year, 2-1-1 received 77,965 calls from residents seeking mental health and substance abuse treatment. Connecticut residents are crying out for help. They're begging for help. We cannot help them without adequate funding.

BHcare serves as the LMHA for residents of 11 towns throughout Greater New Haven, the Lower Naugatuck Valley and the Shoreline. Each year we provide more than 100,000 mental health and addiction treatment services and supports for over 2,500 Connecticut residents. These individuals are struggling with chronic disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. BHcare and other LMHAs depend on DMHAS grant funds to provide the critical treatment, care management and support these individuals need to live safe, healthy and productive lives.

When Connecticut was in a fiscal crisis, nonprofit providers bore the brunt of the budget cuts. BHcare alone received state contract reductions nearing \$1 million, which reduced our capacity to serve by 500 individuals. Now the state is experiencing surpluses in the hundreds of millions and it's time to make nonprofit providers like BHcare whole.

I 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. 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.

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. Nonprofits are innovative, economic drivers that are critical to the success of our communities and the State as a whole. The right investment from the State will ensure stronger, more sustainable nonprofit providers that reduce the cost of government, while promoting better outcomes and greater return on taxpayer dollars.