

**Testimony of Valerie S Williams
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, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Valerie Williams, I live and vote in Stratford, I am the Executive Director for Keystone House, Inc in Norwalk and I am a member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).

Keystone House has two 24/7 Group Homes, providing a safe rehab oriented home for over 25 individual a year, a 24/7 Supervised Home providing a safe supportive living environment for over 6 individual a year, a 32+ person Community Support Program, a 20+ person Supportive Housing Program. We operate a Social Rehab program providing services to over 100 people each year.

We believe that adults facing the many challenges of a mental illness can live happy and safe lives.

We provide these services that are essential, we have waiting lists, I was just at a NAMI meeting in Stamford and listened to the frustrations of parents, siblings and caregivers who struggle every day to find safe affordable housing with supports for their loved one. Like most all nonprofits in Connecticut, we are funded by state contracts, participate in the Medicaid Rehab Option, we apply for and receive many grants from area churches and foundations, we have hundreds of individual donors. We sell tickets to fundraisers, we sell oranges and chocolates, we use used office furniture and take donations of sheets and blankets for our clients. Every penny a nonprofit receives is tightly watched by our internal leadership, our Board of Directors, DMHAS & OPM, HUD, and our annual independent audit.

Community nonprofits, like Keystone, provide essential services in every city and town and CT. We provide safe and needed services to thousands and thousands of CT citizens. CT nonprofits are also a work site, we are employers, as a group we employ tens of thousands of people, we should not be so ignored and placed on the back burner.

We are asking that the legislature appropriate \$461 million dollars over the next five years for community nonprofits. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost more than that in state funding, our contracts do not keep up with inflation, over the last 13 years wages have increased, costs of rent have gone up, our utility costs have gone up, the demand and need for services have gone up- yet our state funded contracts have pretty much remained flat. The legislature approved an increase in the minimum wage over the next several years- yet we have been told that our contract amounts will not increase to address the wage hikes adequately.

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.

What I request be appropriated:

- Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2025;
- Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2021, a 7% increase, but do not restrict the use to new programs, we need the funds for our existing services.

What is the best way to stop this groveling for money every year- index contractual increases to inflation. **Make a commitment to the citizens of Connecticut- tell our voters that you want to provide good services to those citizens struggling with a serious and persistent mental illness, tell those struggling that you care –tell families that they have support for their adults children who they watch struggle to just make it though the day.**

It really is quite simple- Index increases to inflation, this will ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Valerie S Williams
Stratford