

**Testimony of NAMI Connecticut  
By Lisa Winjum, JD  
Executive Director  
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 Lisa Winjum, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut State Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Connecticut). NAMI is the nation's largest mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut has been providing support groups, education programs, and advocacy for people, including children, affected by mental illness for 35 years.

NAMI Connecticut (NAMI CT) envisions a world where all people affected in any way by mental health conditions experience the best possible quality of life and where mental health is accepted as an integral part of overall wellbeing. Our mission is to provide support, education, and advocacy for people in Connecticut who are affected by mental illness.

Together with our nine affiliates and more than 200 volunteers, in FY 2018-2019 NAMI reached more than 10,000 people through 71 family and peer support groups—including 13 groups for people ages 18 to 29—380 In Our Own Voice and Ending the Silence presentations, and 29 NAMI Basics, Family to Family, and Homefront education classes. We connected 540 callers to our NAMI CT helpline with resources and support, including information about housing and legal services.

NAMI Basics, Family-to-Family, and Homefront education classes are for parents, families, and loved ones of people with mental illness. Basics is a class for parents, guardians and other family caregivers who provide care for youth (age 22 or younger) who are experiencing mental health symptoms. NAMI Family-to-Family is a class for families, significant others and friends of people with mental health conditions. It is designed to facilitate a better understanding of mental health conditions, increase coping skills and empower participants to become advocates for their family members. This program was designated as an evidence-based program by SAMHSA. Homefront is designed to help families, caregivers and friends of military service members and veterans with mental health conditions understand the specific challenges and improve their ability to support their service member or veteran.

Ending the Silence is an educational presentation designed for middle and high school students, school staff, and parents or guardians of middle or high school students. Presenters talk about the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, how to recognize the early warning signs and the importance of acknowledging those warning signs. In Our Own Voice education presentations promote awareness of mental health conditions and recovery. They are delivered in a variety of venues including community groups, churches, hospitals, and workplaces.

NAMI CT also collaborated with the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement to support 7 Crisis Intervention Team Academies offered throughout the state serving approximately 250 police officers and their mental health partners. We provided one Mental Health Training for Court Support Services of the Judicial

branch serving 20 probation officers. NAMI CT also taught two Suicide Intervention Skills Trainings for first responders, healthcare providers, and community members.

Our Education and Support Services Coordinator completed, 13 Provider Education Presentations reaching 226 Mental Health Providers. We also conducted a comprehensive Provider Education Training Class for 12 new Teachers/Panelists to lead our Provider Education programs. Eight people were trained to facilitate Opioid support groups. A total of 184 new family members attend one of Opioid support groups.

NAMI CT provided suicide prevention and mental health training to 50 young leaders and ran five NAMI on campus clubs. Student leaders from the NAMI on Campus clubs have partnered with other coalitions and campus initiatives to raise awareness and advocate at the state level about suicide, mental health, and support services.

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 DMHAS' budget.*

**We 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.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

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