



Kimberlee Pita  
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW  
President & CEO

**Testimony of Kim Sirois Pita  
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 afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kim Sirois Pita and I am Board Chair of Mental Health Connecticut.

I am here today to share my story to help you understand how critical it is to increase funding for mental health services in this state. We are witnessing a surge in preteens, teens and young adults struggling to just get by because of their mental health. Veterans are dying by suicide at an alarming rate. The Opioid crisis is impacting every single community in Connecticut.

Mental health conditions affect 1 in every 4 people. Look around you. That's 1 in every 4 of us in this room.

A significant impediment here in Connecticut is access to care. Maintaining a flat budget will force nonprofit service providers to reduce staffing and programs, which will only further compromise access to care. Across our 169 towns and cities, mental health can no longer be marginalized. Lives are depending on it. We need to be there for our children, our families, our neighbors and ourselves.

My only sister Kelly was diagnosed with PTSD after a near fatal car accident in Stonington, CT on prom night. A few years later she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. To this day, I remember how scared I was when my mother first told me about the diagnosis in our East Hartford living room. The beautiful girl I envied, who was the star softball pitcher and prom queen in high school, became clouded by delusions and paranoia. It was hard to comprehend and honestly watch. I wondered if I was going to become just like Kelly. After all we were only 14 months apart...Irish twins.

Suffering from chronic back and neck pain, my sister loaded up on prescription and street drugs. In search of peace, Kelly moved herself out of East Hartford to Arizona, where she eventually died of a drug overdose. Unfortunately, the peace she found was eternal.

I wish Kelly didn't run away to Arizona. Maybe things would have ended differently. Mental health is as important as physical health, and we can't sweep it under the rug. We need to invest in our residents because recovery is possible with the right treatment in place. I am a perfect example of someone who has received care for my depression and anxiety so I can function in my every day life.



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As a Connecticut resident I used to be proud of our state which ranked #1 in mental health care. But over the last five years I have watched us slip down into 10<sup>th</sup> place in the country. Is that how we want to be known?

We tend to have a big issue in Connecticut with our rankings. Perhaps mental health is an area where we should soar to first place again. Our residents deserve it. And no one should end up like my sister – alone, tormented and in search of care.

Please do the right thing. 1 in 4 people are counting on you, including me!

Thank you.

Kim Pita  
MHC Board Chair