

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee**

**Public Hearing re: HB 5005, AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2021**

Michael Awad, PhD

Department of Psychiatry, Yale School of Medicine

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As a clinical psychologist and professional counselor with nearly 10 years of experience treating people whose lives have been affected by addiction, I can say with the utmost confidence that more resources are needed at the state and community levels to prevent early onset of substance abuse among our youth. A community's most precious and valuable resource is their youth. Simply put, a community without thriving youth is a community without a future.

I am writing to advocate on behalf of funding alcohol and substance abuse prevention programs for youth in Connecticut. This includes **HB#5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021** which supports The Governor's Prevention Partnership through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Having worked on the treatment side for many years, I can personally attest to the devastating and pervasive consequences of substance abuse on individuals, families, and their communities. Quite literally, it is a door that, once opened, is nearly impossible to shut. For this reason, we must make sure it is a door that stays locked.

Advancements have been made in the last decade to make treatment more available – and these efforts have proven to be successful in Connecticut with more people being able to access treatment than ever before; however, the influx of drugs into Connecticut has not decreased and, as the midpoint between the two major metropolises of New York City and Boston, it is unlikely they ever will. With substance abuse-related deaths on the rise, it is critical that we be proactive with our efforts to start addressing the root causes of why substance abuse exists in our towns and cities in the first place. Doing so will prevent the enormous social and economic losses our communities experience when lives are lost.

For our young people who get catapulted in to the abyss of addiction, the most heartbreaking part is not the drugs and alcohol that can rob them of their lives, but the long-term sequelae of criminal behavior, aggression and violence, high school dropout, employment problems, and lower life satisfaction they will eventually face in adulthood.

As the chair and coordinator of the New Haven Prevention Council, I work with youth across the city of New Haven on a new initiative called OneStep, a social marketing initiative that promotes healthy living and positive youth development through prosocial activities, community and school events, mentoring, and wraparound services. Our program is grounded in both research and evidence-based practices, which all indicate that in order for youth to remain drug-free, they need ample opportunities to develop their talents and passions, they need caring and supportive adults in their lives, and they need education on how to be healthy. Our formula has been successful for the last few years, with rates of substance

use among teenagers in New Haven remaining relatively stable, but we are faced with new threats through the recent explosion of vaping and Juuling. More and more teens and adults believe vaping is harmless and a healthier alternative to smoking. Research on the short-term consequences of vaping refutes this. We cannot wait for research to be published on the long-term consequences. The time to act is now.

It has been my pleasure working in the area of prevention these last few years in the Division of Prevention and Community Research at Yale University. We are truly changing the lives of young people by building their health literacy, providing them with opportunities in their schools and community for positive development, but most importantly, putting them on a trajectory where they learn adaptive skills for dealing with the intergenerational trauma that has plagued families and neighborhoods in New Haven for years. I am indebted to the great work of the Governor's Prevention Partnership for giving New Haven youth a seat at the table to inform statewide prevention practices and policies that helping youth in Connecticut make more informed decisions about their health and better choices for their futures. Without this program, our schools would lack the student leaders and role models that are critical for providing positive influences in a world where our youth are exposed to a 24-hour loop of negative influences on social media. I implore you to continue funding such programs so that our state's future—our youth—can rise to the occasion and have the chance to live their highest potential.