

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee  
February 21, 2020**

**Public Hearing on: [H.B. 5005](#) An Act Adjusting The State Budget  
For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021**

**Christina Emery, Executive Director of Prime Time House**

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Christina Emery, Executive Director of Prime Time House. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 5005 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. They are what make Connecticut a great place to live and work.

I am here to 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 over the last thirteen years. 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.

Prime Time House, based in Torrington, offers pathways to independence and productivity to adults living with severe and persistent mental illness. Over 400 adults that reside throughout Litchfield County are served over the course of a year.

Our Clubhouse is a psycho-social form of rehabilitation that follows an evidence-based model shown to aid in recovery. This program is proven to be cost effective compared to other mental healthcare approaches. In fact, one year of holistic recovery services at Prime Time is delivered at an annual cost of \$1,716 per individual, much less than the cost of a 2-week psychiatric hospital stay.

Our contract with DMHAS is to provide social rehab services to 50 individuals per month; however due to the growing need, we are actually supporting over 100 unique individuals each month with a small Clubhouse staff of just five full-time and one part-time employees. The members we support come for friendship, a healthy meal, to access our food pantry, and to contribute to the running of the Clubhouse by participating in the work ordered day. Our members regain confidence and learn skills to return to the workforce; we currently are supporting 11 that

enrolled in college courses or vocational training; while an additional 37 members collectively earned \$444,000 in wages last year, proudly contributing to our community and economy.

Our Career Services Supported Employment program helps adults with mental illness obtain and retain jobs. This job can be a lifeline, it gives someone struggling with mental health a purpose and a reason to get out of bed in the morning. It also puts people to work in the community; when comparing the employment rate among people living with mental illness, the rate for our program participants is 42%, as opposed to just 15% of the general population for those with mental illness.

The goals of providing high-quality mental health services do not come without challenges. Year-after-year of flat funding and budget cuts continue to put pressure on our community nonprofit. We have already eliminated a transportation service that provided 300 rides over a three-month period throughout rural Litchfield County to help individuals get to medical appointments and access community services. We have made significant cuts to our food budget which directly impacts the daily lunches members rely on, as well as the amount of offerings available in our food pantry that helps to fight food insecurity. We have cut funding for staff training and vehicle leases. We have deferred facilities maintenance and capital improvement projects to our aging buildings. There simply isn't anything left to cut without eliminating programs.

The stagnant wages that we are forced to offer make it extremely difficult to retain valuable employees. Last year, we had a 35% staff turnover rate. While all reported that they loved working at Prime Time House and contributing to our mission, they simply couldn't afford to do so. In addition to the time and cost of hiring and training new staff, turnover negatively impacts the individuals we support by contributing to depression and anxiety. The increase in minimum wage will only add to the wage compression issue, making it even harder to recruit qualified employees.

I appreciate the fact that there are no easy decisions during these difficult budget years. I do however ask that you remember that community providers can reduce state costs while supporting a growing and vulnerable population in great need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.