

Testimony of Pam Mautte
President, Connecticut Prevention Network

Re: H.B. 5055- H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

Concerning

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services- Prevention Funding

Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing, February 21, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and Members of the Appropriations Committee, on behalf of the Connecticut Prevention Network and the state's five Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations (hereinafter RBHAOs), thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services budget.

Among other services, the RBHAOs assess the behavioral health needs of children, adolescents and adults across the regions, develop Regional Strategic Plans to include priority recommendations for prevention, treatment and recovery services, administer the Local Prevention Council (LPC) grants to municipalities to stimulate the development and implementation of prevention activities, build the capacity of local communities to understand and address problem gambling, raise awareness and provide advocacy to the general public related to mental health promotion and substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery, activities across each region and serve on local, regional and statewide advisory and planning bodies.

We must point out that the State now does not fund any of this important work and that the five RBHAOs are instead funded via federal grant dollars through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. It has not always been like this and in past years the state devoted over \$1.5 million to the former Regional Action Councils and Regional Mental Health Boards.

The lack of prevention funding in the state budget is notable throughout the budget. Whether it is tobacco cessation or suicide prevention, the State is severely lacking in preventive strategies to address critical issues. Recently, the Chief Medical Examiner reported that accidental intoxication deaths in Connecticut jumped 18% to hit a record high 1,200 in 2019. This is despite years of legislative efforts to address the issues and numerous resources among treatment agencies and healthcare providers that have in many cases saved lives.

We need to do better and we can. Investment in prevention is necessary. Funding mental health promotion and substance abuse prevention will substantially reduce future cost burdens to our state. Studies from RAND and PIRE Institutes, among others, indicate that every dollar spent supporting best practices in prevention will save between \$17 and \$36 in treatment and addressing other negative consequences later on.

Despite continued reductions, Connecticut has built a strong prevention infrastructure, we have the skills, certifications and partnerships to provide sophisticated programs and initiatives. What we need is secure funding appropriated for this work to continue. When the state explores expanded gambling, legalizing cannabis or increasing taxes on vaping products, there should be a concerted effort by the General Assembly to include prevention dollars.

At a time when we are seeing an increase in accidental overdose deaths, youth anxiety and depression, vaping use and the misuse of prescription drugs, our communities deserve the proactive approaches to these on-going challenges. We urge you to fund prevention efforts.