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Certified Peer Support Specialist

Senator Osten, Representative Toni Walker, and respective members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Harold Grimes. I live and vote in Windsor, Connecticut.

I am a certified peer support specialist. I received training from Advocacy Unlimited, Inc., which is a statewide, peer-led, organization that is dedicated to improving the wellbeing and outcomes for individuals who experience mental health and co-occurring disorders (www.advocacy_unlimited.org). I am also a Facilitator of several peer to peer support groups for NAMI CT. I have been in recovery from mental health challenges for over 40 years.

I am writing in support of the Governor's proposal for the DMHAS budget.

Currently, it is estimated that 20%, or 1 out of 5, Connecticut residents will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. **Given this statistic, it is critical that we preserve funding for DMHAS to ensure that the continuum of services is maintained within our state.** When I speak about the continuum of services, I am speaking about prevention, intervention, treatment, and peer recovery services.

When taking up the challenge of fiscal responsibility, please consider the rising costs of service delivery, the investment in clinical oriented services and treatment, along with the reported outcomes of the agency.

As I have stated, I have been working with mental health issues a large portion of my adult life. I have family members who have struggled far longer than I have struggled. While I broke from the harsh ideas of mental health in the 1960s and 1970s, My sister has not been so lucky. She was mis-diagnosed with severe mental health issues at age 6. Immediately she was put into special programs, segregated from her friends, family and a more rewarding life. By the time she was properly diagnosed with severe hearing loss, she had been institutionalized mentally and has been forever lost in the system. Had she been given proper diagnosis and treatment, I have no doubt she would still be a productive member of society.

Fast forward to today. I am a disabled veteran and I go to the healing and recovery program at the Newington VA. I see first-hand every day how peer support has a positive effect on an individual. Many veterans like myself, bounced in and out of hospitals for years until we were in a peer setting. Once the attitude of the program went from "we know what is best for the patient" to let's work together to figure the best course of treatment the change was astounding. I have not even considered drastic treatment for four years. I see veterans every day finally get out of isolation and become better for themselves. If they do not return to the work force, they at least are not stuck in their own minds.

In my opinion from my experience, while clinical therapies have a place, a person's own mind is just as if not more important.

To summarize, there are areas that are growing disproportionately, and possibly there are deeper discussions that can be taken up as we consider the outcomes we expect for 719,335 of our neighbors, friends, and family members who, like myself, my sister, and my veteran friends who have or will experience the symptoms of a mental health challenge within their lifetime.