

TESTIMONY OF SUSAN BUCHSBAUM BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

PUBLIC HEARING HELD FEBRUARY 21, 2020

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Budget

REGARDING HB 05005, AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Susan Buchsbaum and I am a resident of, Stamford, and I vote in all elections and primaries. I am also a certified Recovery Support Specialist and am a member of Keep the Promise Coalition. In addition, I am a board member of The Hub: Behavioral Health Action Organization for Southwestern CT (Formerly the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board).

I am here to testify on the proposed budget for DMHAS.

I am happy to see that the DMHAS budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2021 is little changed from the fiscal year 2019 and 2020 budgets. In addition, the \$3 million expansion to fund community placements for individuals at CVH who are ready for discharge is an excellent addition to the DMHAS budget.

I say this with conviction based on my own personal experience of being served by the DMHAS system. Over 30 years ago I was a patient at Fairfield Hills Hospital in Newtown. I was kept at the hospital for six months after I was ready for discharge. Why? I was waiting for a bed to open up at a halfway house. It is wrong to detain people at CVH just because there isn't sufficient state funding to support community living for people with lived experience of mental illness. This is the promise that was broken in 1999, by not shifting state funding to the development of community support systems.

I have received services from DMHAS and DMHAS funded nonprofit agencies for over 30 years. I receive services at the F.S. Dubois Center, a DMHAS outpatient facility in Stamford, and employment support services from Laurel House, also located in Stamford. Because I have received DMHAS and DMHAS funded mental health services in my community over decades, I am allowed a longitudinal view of the changes at the Dubois Center and at Laurel

House. I believe that an area that needs the focus of DMHAS and funding are services for senior adults. Just as there is a set-aside for Young Adult Services, so too should there be separate funding for senior behavioral health services. I recently turned 60, and believe that my behavioral health needs are different from those of adults in other age groups. In the future, it would behoove this committee and DMHAS to design programs for and about the needs of those of us entering the final third of the life cycle.

Lastly, funding for community nonprofits providing behavioral health services has remained flat for the past 14 years. This has resulted in program cuts to nonprofit agencies that provide behavioral health supports, which, has resulted in cuts to programs that provide crucial services to people like me. I agree with the CT Nonprofit Alliance's proposal to increase funding back to 2007 levels, and to increase funding by the amount of \$461 million.

Thank you for your time and attention; I greatly appreciate being able to offer my point of view to members of this committee.

Best regards,

Susan Buchsbaum
Stamford