

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**  
**February 21, 2020**  
**H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE**  
**BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021**

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Mike Doyle and I am a registered voter in Norwich.

I am here to testify regarding H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.

I am here today to support the Governor's proposed budget to preserve the funds earmarked for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; specifically, funds allocated for non-profit agencies. I am also here today to ask that you consider allocating more funds for the valuable and necessary services non-profit agencies provide. As the Director of the Penobscot Place Recovery Center and the Recovery Coach Program at Reliance Health, a Norwich-based non-profit agency serving Eastern CT, I see how these programs and services directly impact the lives of the people I work with; and as a person in long-term recovery, I have also personally experienced the effect similar services had on my own life.

I am relatively certain I was an alcoholic before I ever took my first drink. I clearly remember thinking half-way through that first drink, "Boy, I can't wait to have another one of these!" Now, I am in no way an expert in child development, but I am fairly certain this would not be considered normal for an 11 year-old, but this and other thoughts like it most certainly inhabited my brain and it's fair to say that, despite taking a few years for my disease to really kick in, I was off and running. My drinking progressed as I entered my teens and by my sophomore year of high school, I was drinking to excess most every weekend—the sober weekends existing only because I was probably grounded—and by my freshman year of college, I was drunk every weekend (and most weekdays). It was around this time where I also began struggling with depression, although I didn't know that's what it was—my dad just thought I was lazy—and often times my depression manifested itself as anger towards others—mostly because I was angry at myself and hurting someone else was just easier. Even the structure of the United States Air Force only helped for a short time and I continued to struggle with addiction and mental health until it had cost me nearly everything in my life; relationships, jobs, trust, dignity, respect, my freedom, credibility and was absolutely a leading factor in the premature end of what was once a promising military career. Thankfully, I had people around me that not only understood my struggles, but wanted to help; people who cared about me before I possessed the ability to care about myself. It is because of these people that I received the help I needed and because of these people, I celebrated 20 years of sobriety last summer. Today, I am blessed to be able to bestow upon others the help, care and compassion I received when I needed it most.

The people I speak of—those who care about others that struggle to care for themselves—are the lifeblood of Reliance Health and non-profit organizations throughout the state. I am surrounded by some of the most talented, caring and loving people you will ever meet. It really is the culture of our agency; in fact, one of our main tenets mirrors that of our now retired CEO Dave Burnett, which is simply that, "Love is a Medical Necessity." Unfortunately, it is becoming more difficult to retain these loving, highly-qualified people as it is difficult to make ends meet with the wages

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that are currently available. In fact, many of our direct care staff qualify for some of the same benefits as the people they serve.

Since 2014—or roughly when the opioid epidemic began ramping up in Connecticut—nonprofit agencies in the human services sector have undergone a 17% reduction in allocated funds; at a time where more than 4,000 CT residents have perished by drug overdose, funds to care for those that struggle to care for themselves actually went down. It is simply impossible to ask nonprofits to continue to do more with less and the amazing people who work for nonprofits, the lifeblood, cannot be expected to continue to work for what is barely a living wage.

Please consider allocating more funds to non-profit organizations. I am aware that it is not the task of this committee to generate revenue; I am also aware that the state is no longer operating at a budget deficit. I urge you consider allocating more funds so that nonprofits can continue to offer the valuable services they provide to communities statewide.

Thank you for your time today and letting me share my story.