

Written statement of John O. Schwartz

Concerning DMHAS funding

Appropriations committee

Friday, 2/21/2020

Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker and members of the committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the CT DMHAS budget. The CT Department of Mental health and addiction services provides support and resources to some of the state's most vulnerable citizens. The agency does a remarkable job in supporting a wide variety of services and organizations in order to support CT residents in their quest for living self-directed lives. With the current influx of highly potent synthetic opioids in our state and the increased risk of fatal overdose which accompanies this influx, it is increasingly important that DMHAS not only continue, but expand their efforts to offer access to support for those in or seeking recovery from substance use disorder. While much is discussed regarding treatment and evidence-based practices when the subject of addiction and recovery comes up, the often-missed piece of the puzzle is sustainable long-term recovery. Recovery support services in the form of Recovery community centers, programs such as telephone recovery support, risk reduction and connection to the wider recovery community offer not only hope, but a practical means of building and transforming lives.

In my personal experience, the gift of perspective, the lack of blame or judgement, the level of compassion and useful information that RCO's offer continue to be the brightest shining light in my own recovery. My journey, like many others has so much more to do with maintaining a realistic worldview and feeling comfortable enough in my own skin so that the thought of indulging in self-destructive behavior remains an unrealistic option. Recovery community centers have the power to encourage, support, inform and genuinely care for individuals who may not have the capacity to believe that a life in recovery is even a possibility for them, making those centers an invaluable asset to the communities which they serve.

As a person in early recovery, I was subjected to shame, judgement and bias (both external and internal) which fed into my nearly overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and despair. Recovery community organizations work tirelessly to transform public opinion and to say to people like me: "This is an illness, not a moral failing" and "I am living proof that recovery is possible". The experience, generosity and patience of others made it possible for me to recover. The combined strength of the recovery community supported me until I was capable of developing enough self-worth to be able to set and maintain the boundaries necessary to recover. My experience in managing the Windham Recovery Community center in Willimantic has only reaffirmed my belief that recovery support services are a critical bridge between treatment and a life in long-term recovery and I'm grateful for every moment that I spend in the company of the WRCC community, supporting others as I was once supported. Please support continued and expanded funding for DMHAS and for recovery support services in our state.

Thank you to the committee for hearing my testimony,

John O. Schwartz