



**SEIU**Healthcare®  
United for Quality Care

February 21, 2020  
Jay Patel, Pharmacist  
Whiting Forensic Hospital  
SEIU District 1199 New England  
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, My name is Jay Patel and I work as a Pharmacist at Whiting Forensic Hospital, also known as “WFH,” a DMHAS state-run forensic mental health hospital in Middletown. The clients at WFH represent a population within the state that require critical medical attention and acute care—many of whom are receiving carefully planned medication treatment. I help to ensure that the clients receive their medications in collaboration with the other medical professionals on this hospital’s campus.

I am here because I would like to testify on behalf of WFH and its clientele to ask for more funding for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. DMHAS provides many support programs essential to patients of broad demographics. It is important that we are funding mental health services in Connecticut. Here at WFH, I can attest to the effects budget cuts have had on services over the years. Reductions in our operating budget have resulted in reduced staffing levels, decreased the time to perform essential job functions, stress on an already tight drug budget and an inability to recruit and retain highly skilled staff.

With reduced staffing levels, people are rushing to complete tasks in allotted hours and this causes increase in error rates as well as decreased attention to detail in other aspects. Reduced staffing increases the time it takes to address issues on the wards such as delivering urgent medication or fixing automated medication dispensing machines. This means that the burden of having to attend to issues normally handled by support staff is pushed onto pharmacists which pull us away from providing clinical services.

Pressure to find efficiencies has also impacted the medications we are using to treat patients. Prescribers are forced to choose between newer drugs with lower side effects or using older meds with harsher side effect profiles to save money. Moreover, DMHAS funding does not consider drug cost due to inflation which has averaged 5-8% in the past couple years nor does take into account patients with high cost drug treatments such as Hepatitis C. Factoring in just these costs pushes us over budget because we are already inadequately funded. Just one or two complicated patients can increase costs by \$50,000/month which is not being considered.

Finally, in the last few years we have witnessed the departure of our fellow Pharmacists due to disparate pay when compared others. With such low salaries, it becomes even more difficult to recruit and retain the best talent to perform a vital role in the healthcare system. The only way to serve our patients is to increase DMHAS funding and not cut it. Such fiscal pressure to constantly cut expenditure compromises the quality of healthcare that we deliver and puts those mentally ill patients at risk.

Please fund DMHAS the way we should be funding mental health in Connecticut. Please give workers like me the resources to provide care the way I know how to. Thank you for your time.