



State of Connecticut
HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE
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HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

Testimony in Support of House Bill 5742
Appropriations Committee
March 26, 2021

Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Walker, Ranking Members Senator Miner and Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 5742, *An Act Concerning the Use of COVID-19 Relief Funds for Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Substance Abuse Service Providers*.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an alarming need for funding for many service providers across our state. Often, people who struggle with their mental health, have thoughts of suicide, are victims of domestic violence, or have substance abuse issues are most at risk in their home. Between March and December of 2020, one domestic violence organization spent nearly \$600,000 in unanticipated hotel costs across the state to provide safe housing for victims of domestic violence. This is well above a typical statewide annual cost of \$75,000. Those costs did not include the extra funds needed to supply other needs for families - providing three meals a day; paying for Wi-Fi, providing laptops or tablets to children so that they could participate in remote learning; and increased staff time to manage hoteling, including issues listed above, and typical case management with survivors and children.

The effects of the pandemic on those who suffer from substance abuse issues have been profound and disturbing. After hitting a record high of 1200 in overdose deaths in 2019, there were 1,359 confirmed drug overdose deaths in the state in 2020. The lack of in-person counseling led to a decline in the numbers of those seeking treatment as well. Connecticut residents of all ages have reached out for help with mental health during the pandemic. An increasing number of those in need appears to be under the age of 18, according to some pediatric and social services experts. 211 Connecticut, which tracks requests for mental health services, had less than 50,000 such inquiries across all age groups to the system between February 1, 2019 and February 1, 2020. During that same amount of time from February 1, 2020 to February 1, 2021, the number of those mental health services requests increased to 59,766. Since August 2019, Hartford Hospital has conducted a suicide risk screening for every child age 10 and up who visits emergency services. On average, about 16% of children show signs that indicate risk of suicide. That number increased to 19% in October, then 24% in November. It stayed around 21% in December¹.

¹ <https://www.courant.com/coronavirus/hc-news-coronavirus-student-mental-health-20210116-onif6qk37vflzo6mmgamea3tou-story.html>

We must act to ensure that the residents of Connecticut confronting these challenges have the support they deserve and that the organizations helping them have the resources they need. This proposal requires that COVID-19 relief funds be used as additional funding for more domestic violence, mental health, suicide prevention and substance abuse services for those who have suffering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this bill, the legislature has a chance to prove that people who are victims of domestic violence, have troubles with their mental health, have suicidal thoughts or need substance abuse intervention are not forgotten. We suggest that the committee expand the pool of federal COVID-19 related funds that can help pay for these services by not limiting it only to funds from the CARES Act and the CRRSA Act, but to include any future federal dollars that may be made available to the state. The language of the bill, as currently written, limits funding to these two sources, and those funds have already been earmarked by the Office of Policy and Management.

On behalf of the House Republican Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 5742. We look forward to working with the committee on this important piece of legislation. I'd be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.