

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee**  
**March 2, 2021**  
**DMHAS BUDGET HEARING**  
**H.B. No. 6439, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM**  
**ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**  
William Acosta

Good evening Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is William Acosta, and I am a registered voter in the City of Bridgeport.

I am here to testify regarding the budget for the next fiscal year for the Department of mental Health and Addiction Services, **H.B. No. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for The Biennium Ending June 30, 2023 And Making Appropriations Therefore.**

I would like to take just a moment to say “thank you” to you, madams chair and the members of this committee for all of the hard work that you do day after day to do right by your constituents and the citizens of this state who represent so many varied interests and agenda. I am a proud voter and I plan to continue to be a proud voter.

I serve—also proudly—as Housing and Advocacy Coordinator at Bridge House in Bridgeport, which is a nonprofit psychosocial rehabilitation day program—or more commonly known as a Clubhouse—that serves adults, *or clubhouse members*, living with chronic mental health conditions.

Beyond the title that I carry at Bridge House—and can stick my chest out because of its fancy sounding name—my personal passion for this work comes from *my own humble* lived experience as the parent of two sons—one of whom happens to be a member at Bridge House—who have lifelong mental health conditions (and the son of a mother—now deceased—who had been diagnosed with a psychotic disorder). There is an intense personal emotional pain that comes with witnessing loved ones in despair—and as *parents* we *cannot* personally help our children. Truth be told, *not one* of us is completely free of being at least relatively close to someone with a mental health condition and a story to tell. But for me and many others, that translates into a relentless energy to serve daily and make a difference in the life of someone who might not otherwise be able to help him or herself.

Since becoming a member at Bridge House in 2007, my son has very heavily relied on and benefitted from the employment, education, housing, involvement in local and state advocacy and becoming an active voter himself, young adult programming and socialization supports that Bridge House gives him *and the more than 200 active clubhouse members on a day-to-day basis*. Day after day, Bridge House, and numerous other clubhouse programs like it across the state, have continued to provide a positive, encouraging environment that honors the value, the integrity, the respect, the honor that so many of our people living with mental health conditions so sorely deserve. And this in spite of the coronavirus pandemic that has forced us to close in order to keep everyone safe. We have continued to connect with all members—be it by limited

occupancy in our buildings, by telephone, by email, video on cell phones, Zoom video, etc. The people in the mental health community to whom we provide unyielding services and support every day, have earned that respect and that honor against incredible odds. Yet they are so often discriminated against because of misperceived notions of how they will behave and “embarrass” the rest of us.

Peer respite services, a wonderful alternative for people living with mental health conditions, is provided by peers usually in a residence setting. Additional funding would be needed for this, but the amounts that would likely be saved from having to hospitalize someone who doesn't need to be hospitalized, would be vast.

*Lives truly do matter*, and I appeal to your conscience; to your vision; to your compassion, and I respectfully request that the funding for mental health programs and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services overall, be maintained, if not increased due the current historic health crisis.

Thank you again, madams chair and members of the committee.