

**March 2, 2021**

**Testimony before Appropriations Committee H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT  
CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Eden Almasude and I am a registered voter in New Haven and a psychiatrist working at Yale-New Haven Hospital and Yale Mental Health & Counseling. I am writing to call for funding to establish peer respite centers in our state.

It is imperative that we have safe and supportive environments for community members experiencing mental health crisis. Unfortunately, emergency room visits and psychiatric hospitalizations are not only extremely costly, but often do harm to people who are already in severe distress. This is why we need alternatives such as peer respite centers, which is a cost effective option for a person to be cared for and be safe while experiencing crisis.

I work in the psychiatric emergency room of Yale-New Haven Hospital, where I see people suffering with exactly such mental health crises. Instead of being met with a calm environment and a listening ear, these community members are kept for days on end in a crowded ER and with the risk of exposure to COVID-19 while waiting for a bed. People are often lining the hallways where it is impossible to sleep or feel comforted. On my last shifts, I saw patients waiting over a week for a bed on an inpatient unit. We can and must do things differently. Peer respite is a key alternative to hospitalization that would decrease ER usage and provide humane care.

One patient came into the hospital with severe depression and was taking action to end her life. She was crying throughout our conversation and desperately wanted help. Given the lack of alternative places to stay safe, I recommended inpatient hospitalization and she agreed. The next day, she told me that in the chaotic environment of the ER her mental state was further deteriorating and she began to lose any hope she had held onto. She told me, "I came here for help, and I'm only getting worse" and begged me to let her leave.

Connecticut has an opportunity to join 18 other states who have invested in peer respite and change the way we care for people in severe emotional distress. I am asking you to support the establishment of a peer respite center in each of the five DMHAS regions. This would cost an estimated \$6 million in the first year, and \$5 million annually to sustain them. This is far less costly than emergency room stays and inpatient hospitalizations, and serves as an investment in the mental health and wellbeing of our community members.

Thank you for your consideration. Please reach out with any questions.

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