

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
Todd Banks

Good evening, Sen. Olsten, Rep. Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Todd Banks, and I am a registered voter in the City of West Haven.

I am testifying regarding the budget 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 have been a member of the staff at Bridge House in Bridgeport since January 2019. Our purpose is to provide support for adults living with a persisting mental illness.

I was interviewed by a mix of Bridge House staff and senior members. In my first interview, I commented that the primary goal for adults facing mental health challenges is to improve general wellness. My future boss became engaged. She agreed with me, but pointed out that promoting general wellness becomes a powerful contributor to mental health recovery when combined with working strategies that support greater independence and social compatibility for our members.

Bridge House helps guide our over 200 active members for issues from basic self-reliance and housing needs to monthly budgeting and career development. What I love about Bridge House, however, is best seen through my experiences.

- I have seen the looks on our members' faces when we deliver 20 – 50 lbs of groceries to their doors each Friday since the COVID-19 pandemic started.
- I have seen the happy face of a man battling schizoaffective disorder when he was told that he could maintain his independent living because of the home support service we'd found that could accommodate a difficult list of his specific needs.
- I have seen a member of our staff save a member's life by administering CPR.
- I have seen the confused look on one of our member's face become more at ease one evening, when we picked him up at a gas station, wearing dress shoes and no socks when the temperature was 4 degrees F.
- I have seen an older gentleman living with schizophrenia go from a person that was alone and asocial to one who is interesting and conversational because of the amount of positive reinforcement he has received.
- I have seen another man living with schizophrenia go from an even deeper level of an asocial character to an active member who is challenged by working in the Bridge House food pantry and culinary unit twice a week.

- I have seen member after member arrive at Bridge House in varying states of anxiety, just needing someone to listen to them. Sometime our members need just a little reassurance before going back out there to face the world.
- I have seen members who were once daily visitors to Bridge House, come back with happy and confident smiles on their faces and wearing professional attire. Still members, but moving on to more stable, independent and more personally satisfying lives.

There are an endless number of moments I can tell you about where Bridge House has given meaningful support to people working to live well while coping with a persistent mental illness.

I would like to end by saying that what our members have in common is that they are good people who understand the value of being kind and respectful. I have come to Bridge House to work with people in an environment that will help find pathways to better mental health and big steps towards better overall wellness.

I strongly urge this committee to continue or increase funding for Bridge House and other community based non-profit programs like it. Bridge House and others programs like it are integrated with the community in ways that support health for the people with whom we are involved and the city of Bridgeport as a whole.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to provide my testimony.