



Scott Brabant
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee, Health Subcommittee, regarding:

H.B. 6439 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTEENTH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

**Public Hearing
Tuesday, March 2 ~ 10:00 am**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Scott Brabant and I wish to share comments in regards to H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.

I am the Board Chair of Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), a 113-year-old nonprofit, and have been a board member for six years. I am here to express my concern on the proposed state budget and to share my perspective as a steward of MHC, an organization that continues to demonstrate its value through excellent delivery of high-quality mental health services and supports.

I am here to respectfully request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least **\$461 million in state funding** that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. Please:

- Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026;
- Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2022, a 7% increase;
- Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future
- Hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19

MHC continues to do more with less. MHC, like many non-profits, have been the target of repeated budget cuts and rescissions. For example, in FY 2017, DMHAS contracts were cut 5%, while total grant funding has been cut more than 17% since FY 2013, despite the fact that Connecticut has been ravaged by an opioid crisis and more people re-entering society after having served time in prison. In 2020, despite a pandemic and social unrest that will continue to impact our country, MHC's quality of care never wavered. Our staff transformed their work environment, including deploying telehealth in 75% of programs (from nearly 100% in-person care), to ensure the physical safety and mental health of our program participants were the top priority.



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Without attention paid to this severe funding gap, however, I am troubled for our future. I am concerned that if funding levels are not restored and keep pace with inflation moving forward, that MHC will have difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff, ensuring safe and secure environments for services, and meeting the basic needs of our program participants so they can continue to stay on the path of their recovery journey.

In the business world, there are fundamental factors that must be accounted for in a budget. From the cost of inflation and facilities upkeep to investing in human resources to ensure employee retention is a top priority. MHC, like all community-based non-profits must also be run like a business.

As our President and CEO, Luis Pérez, will testify, MHC's budget is at the mercy of the "discretionary" funding, but the services we provide are not optional. Our staff are essential workers who provide a service for individuals seeking long-term health wellness and independence from higher levels of care.

That said, along with increasing funding by \$461 million over the next five fiscal years, I respectfully request that, In the proposed DMHAS budget, the legislature:

- Support the \$6.3 million increase in Discharge & Diversion Services. Community nonprofits can help people avoid most costly care (EDs, jails, or shelters) and get them on a path toward recovery
- Make recovery support a priority in Connecticut. The need for mental health and substance abuse treatment services is expected to grow significantly as we emerge from the pandemic. Now is the time to invest in substantial improvements and enhancements to the behavioral health system, and this is not the time to flat-fund the DMHAS budget

Investing in diversion strategies with robust funding for community-based services is part of the future of systemic change. While MHC is primarily funded through DMHAS and other state agencies, this organization, like so many non-profits, is critical for addressing the Social Determinants of Health. From our vital housing programs and homelessness diversion, to recovery support, and meeting basic needs through food delivery, employment placement services, and much more, MHC understands that an individual's diagnosis or trauma experience is just one piece of the puzzle that needs to be considered.

Funding MHC, and our fellow non-profits, is an investment in the State of Connecticut that we can no longer afford to ignore. I hope you will agree that investing in our friends and neighbors is vital to the health and future of our great state of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,
Scott Brabant
Board Chair
Mental Health Connecticut