

House Bill 6439 Testimony
Tessa Cappiello

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the House Bill 6439. My name is Tessa Cappiello, I'm a service coordinator at Reliance Health in Norwich. Rather than sharing with you all the reasons that have pushed me to become a social worker and an advocate for our most vulnerable and marginalized, I will instead attempt to use my very limited time to share with you just the tip of the iceberg that illustrates the anger and sorrow I feel as I evaluate the position of our state and our citizens, particularly in respect to our non-profit sector.

There are over 347,000 people in CT who are living in poverty with BIPOC individuals and communities being disproportionately affected. This does not account for people who are above the unrealistic and outdated measure of the FPL who are still struggling to survive. Over 400,000 CT residents struggle with hunger. Between 2017-2018 over 160,000 adults in CT reported an unmet need for mental health treatment. These numbers have only increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are populations that the non-profit sector dedicates itself to everyday. It is estimated that my agency alone serves approximately 1,000 low income persons with severe MH/SUD in a given year. My agency alone distributed over 60k meals to our members since the onset of the pandemic. Our wait lists are at an all-time high. People's needs are at an all-time high. We are exhausting our resources trying to make ends meet. Our non-profit employees are not exempt from the stressors we strive to help our clientele and community members overcome, with or without the pandemic.

Considering these limited statistics, please explain to me why the people who are doing the most and are in need of the most continue to receive the least? If you would like to show the citizens of CT that they are people you care about, value, and wish to see succeed, you will not just hear the words and the stories being presented to you today, as they have in the past. You will take action to prove to your citizens that they matter. You will stop taking part in the stereotype that perpetuates the idea that we are to blame for our supposed "self-inflicted short comings" and instead take responsibility for the disposable lack of resources and opportunity that this state has imposed on its most vulnerable and in need. We should not have to prove that we are worthy of more than the bare minimum. We cannot continue down this stagnant path of pleas and wishes. The policy and budgetary decisions this state makes represent broken promises and it is honestly embarrassing to witness and experience its failure to adequately serve the working and lower class. While you continue to ignore these issues, you continue to ignore the needs of CT citizens. I believe it to be true that we fund what we value. If a global pandemic isn't enough to erupt change, what is? This is so critical to the health and well-being of CT's citizens. So if, after all of this today, you still believe that funding the nonprofit sector is not a priority for our state budget, I encourage you to go ahead and take the extraordinary measures needed to push legislature and fund this cause anyway. Because this problem is bigger than you and it's bigger than me. But that doesn't mean we're not responsible for taking every possible measure to fix it. I'm trying my best to show up for people who need me and I hope you will too. Thank you.