



**To: Members of the Appropriations Committee**  
**From: Roberta J. Cook, President and CEO**  
**Re: Appropriations Committee Budget Hearings: DMHAS**  
**Date: March 2, 2021**

**H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee: I am Roberta Cook, President/CEO of BHcare, a Certified Behavioral Health Clinic serving 11 cities and towns in the Lower Naugatuck Valley and Greater New Haven area.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.

Community nonprofits like BHcare provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. They are what make Connecticut a great place to live and work.

BHcare serves as the Local Mental Health Authority, each year we provide more than 100,000 mental health and addiction treatment services and supports for over 2,500 Connecticut residents. These individuals are struggling with chronic disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. BHcare and other LMHAs depend on DMHAS grant funds to provide the critical treatment, care management and support these individuals need to live safe, healthy and productive lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit our communities especially hard. People are crying out for help. The pandemic has exacerbated the symptoms of the people we serve, and those who've never experienced a behavioral health issue are now struggling with anxiety, depression and substance use. Our new client intakes have increased more than 60% since this time last year. And all the while, we're struggling. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and increased the impact of inadequate funding for nonprofit services and brought unanticipated and unbudgeted costs and operational challenges such as:

- Providing hazard pay for essential workers on the front lines with a higher risk of exposure;
- Procuring expensive and hard to find Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies;
- Creating telehealth services seemingly overnight, and purchasing necessary computers, cybersecurity, online meeting platforms and training for both staff and people receiving services.
- We never closed our doors, even as the pandemic worsened.

Nonprofit providers like BHcare have borne the brunt of cuts when Connecticut was facing fiscal challenges, now is the time to make us whole. People need us now more than ever and the State has a responsibility to ensure accessibility to mental health and substance use services for all its residents. Now is the time to invest in substantial improvements and enhancements to the behavioral health system, not to flat-fund the DMHAS budget.

I 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:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026;
2. 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;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.
4. Hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19.

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. The COVID-19 pandemic proved the services we provide are absolutely critical to the health and wellness of our state. It is time for the State to invest in its nonprofit partners and commit to increasing funding by \$461 million.