



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 Suzi Craig 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.

As the Chief Strategy Officer and Registered Lobbyist for Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), a 113-year-old nonprofit, and I am here to express my concern on our state budget, and to explain how funding for essential community services, across the system of care, will impact the more than 1,000 people we serve daily, our dedicated staff, and the community partners who are critical to our work.

Our mission is to partner with individuals, families, and communities to create environments that support long-term health and wellness. The word “environments” in our mission statement is critical because it is central to everything we do.

I think of the state of Connecticut’s system of care is also an environment. Like all environments, it’s a complex eco-system that relies on many different things to provide health and sustainability. For an individual to benefit from the great services that Connecticut provides, accessing this system of care is critical and it doesn’t always happen through “one door.”

A great example of coordinated care is Connecticut’s Coordinated Access Network or “CAN” system for addressing homelessness through the Department of Housing. MHC is a part of the Northwest CAN, and our staff will tell you that it is truly a coordinated effort of multiple agencies working together to take a regional approach. The CAN accelerates and improves the process of moving individuals and families from homelessness to finding stable housing and accessing basic needs and other services that are essential to helping someone create a sustainable shift in their lives.

The key to making this happen in the CAN is the coordination of multiple agencies working together. If one or two or more of those agencies are not properly funded, then it creates a burden on other agencies to pick up the work, ultimately putting the lives of Connecticut residents at risk.



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As you gather insight and data today to make critical decisions on the budgets for DMHAS and other essential state agencies, please keep the example of the CANs in your mind. The future of healthcare is through collaboration and working within networks to make a collective impact, an approach that continues to prove out as a way to create more sustainable and lasting change.

To fund the system of care for health and human service non-profits, 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:

- 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

In the proposed DMHAS budget, please:

- 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

The health and wellbeing of our friends and neighbors are at stake, as is the future of our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your continued service to Connecticut.

Suzi Craig
Chief Strategy Officer
Registered Lobbyist
Mental Health Connecticut