



CONNECTICUT  
LEGAL  
RIGHTS  
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.  
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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING  
MARCH 2, 2021

**Concerns regarding: HB 6439**, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE  
BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND  
MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR, **specifically the budgets for  
DMHAS and DDS**

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

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Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order that mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community.

I will begin by thanking the Governor for level-funding of the Legal Services line item in the **DMHAS** budget, which provides resources to CLRP to represent its clients. I also want to thank the Administration for providing millions of dollars over the two years of the biennium to support new Money Follows the Person placements, and discharges from Connecticut Valley Hospital (and I assume other state-operated inpatient psychiatric facilities as well). I can't know with certainty that the class action lawsuit currently pending in state court since 2018 regarding the state's failure to (among other things) timely discharge people back to the community has anything to do with this budget proposal; the important thing to our

clients who want to return to a life in the community is that the money be in place to provide the services and supports in the least restrictive, most integrated setting.

The governor's budget proposal essentially maintains funding for housing supports and services and the managed services lines, the money that funds the private non-profits that serve DMHAS clients in the community. Unfortunately, during a time when the need for mental health and addictions services and supports has increased as a result of the pandemic, and providers face increasing costs to keep their staff and clients safe while they continue to deliver services, level funding is not enough, and this budget proposal has locked in rescissions from prior years. I urge this committee to consider appropriating funds to address the needs of this state.

My comments regarding the **DDS** budget are similar. While we are grateful that for the most part, most lines have been maintained, level funding is insufficient to meet growing needs. Locking in the rescissions of past budgets means continuing to do more with less. The increased money to fund caseload growth for employment and day services is appreciated as demands for those services continue. Although more people want to live in integrated community settings rather than group homes, it is distressing that the administration views the closure of a community living arrangement as an opportunity to achieve savings, rather than an opportunity to re-invest money in other needed services.

This, however, is something we have been familiar with over decades. When the state closed two of its large psychiatric hospitals in the mid-1990's, a promise was made to re-invest those savings in the community-based system of care. We are still asking, nearly three decades later, for the state to keep that promise.

Elected officials often state that budgets are not merely spreadsheets, they are statements of the values. This proposed budget reflects a troubling statement of what the values of this state are when it comes to the people who rely on the services of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Department of Developmental Services. I know that this state is capable of doing better, and I urge this committee to hold these agencies, and the administration, to account.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony as you make your decisions.