

DATE: March 2, 2021

TO: Appropriations Committee,
Health Subcommittee

FROM:

Suzanne Gaskell, Gilead Community Services Board Member,
Mother of a child with a mental illness, Connecticut public high school teacher

RE: H.B.6439

An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 13, 2023

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

My name is Suzanne Gaskell. My son was diagnosed with a severe mental illness twenty years ago; he currently resides in a group home at Gilead Community Services. I've served on Gilead's board for several years.

Gilead Community Services has provided a full continuum of Mental Health & Addiction Services in Middlesex County for over 50 years and recently expanded to Hartford County.

I am writing on behalf of my son and the clients and staff at Gilead as well as the countless community members who support and benefit from the services Gilead provides

Please, please, please appropriate \$461 million over the next five years as outlined by the CT Nonprofit Alliance. It is essential, now more than ever, for us to protect and fully fund the essential services that organizations like Gilead provide to the community!

This has been a year like no other. Social inequities that have long existed have been magnified through the lens of Covid. Those struggling with life altering mental illnesses have been especially hard hit. Nonprofits such as Gilead were already stretched thin and are now faced with the additional challenge of caring for an increasing number of people suffering from anxiety, depression, substance abuse and homelessness.

Support much needed services to the most vulnerable.

Compassionate Care
for the Mentally Ill and
Persons with Physical and Developmental Disabilities
Is Fiscally Responsible and Morally Right

Please find creative solutions to increase funding to nonprofits!

Nonprofits can provide quality services at lower costs than when the state provides them.

Over the past 14 years, community nonprofits in Connecticut have lost at least \$461 million in state funding by not keeping pace with inflation or effectively covering increased costs. *(Based on the detailed analysis that has been completed by the CT Nonprofit Alliance)*

As a consequence Gilead Community Services has experienced decreased programming, decreased staffing levels and reduced client capacity in several critical programs while the need for these essential services is clearly on the rise.

Please commit to fund the full \$461 million (28% increase) by Fiscal Year 2026!
Please appropriate \$128 million in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 22 (7% increase)! Please index future increases to inflation to ensure that future funding keeps pace with increase costs!

Are you aware that 2/3 of all adults and 1/2 of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive no mental health services? In 1955, there was 1 psychiatric bed for each 300 Americans in our hospitals; today there is only 1 for every 3,000. One outrageous consequence of the dearth of mental services is that currently there are more people in our prisons (upward of 16%) with serious mental illness than are in state mental hospitals or fully staffed supported housing programs.¹

This is costing us untold, millions of dollars every year and the human costs are incalculable. If nonprofits are not sufficiently funded they will cease to provide services. I fear that many more people will be on the streets and in our state prison system

There are other nonprofit mental health agencies, such as Gilead, that are providing much needed services to many. **Please maintain what is working and encourage new initiatives to support recovery in individuals who are currently without care or hope.**

"The measure of a society is found in how they treat their weakest and most helpless citizens."
James Earl "Jimmy" Carter Jr.

**Support funding to the nonprofits that provide
desperately needed services to people with disabilities.**

**Compassionate Care
Is Fiscally Responsible and Morally Right**

Thank you for your time.

I am a long time resident and taxpayer in the State of Connecticut. My involvement as an educator in the Connecticut Public Schools is ongoing. I also serve on the board of Gilead Community Services in Middletown. Gilead has partnered with Oak Hill, the state's largest provider for persons with physical and developmental disabilities. Gilead also merged with Farrell Treatment Center, in New Britain, in an effort to expand services to individuals who are suffering from substance abuse. One of Gilead's primary missions is to provide access to quality mental health services.

We'd welcome your visit to our program to witness firsthand what we do and discuss our ideas for the future.

Visit our website to learn more:
<http://gileadcs.org/who-we-are/>

Sincerely,

Suzanne Wind Gaskell