

March 2, 2021

Sahana Kribakaran  
Testimony before Appropriations Committee  
H.B. No. 6439 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE  
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS  
THEREFOR.  
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

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

My name is Sahana Kribakaran and I am a registered voter in New Haven, CT. I am also a medical student and PhD candidate in neuroscience and psychology at Yale University. I write with regards to the state budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). More specifically, I write to advocate for funding to open Peer Respite centers in CT.

Currently in CT, when people are in crises, 911 is often called, which can lead to interactions with the police, visits to the emergency room, and psychiatric hospitalizations, to name a few outcomes. In several instances across the country, including in New Haven, interactions with the police during mental health crises have been lethal (Saleh et al., 2018). As a medical student and mental health professional in training, I have witnessed the harm that psychiatric hospitals and emergency department visits can cause. Patients in crises can be restrained, held in the hospital against their will, medicated against their will, all of which can traumatize people and exacerbate their emotional distress. None of these current options provide a safe and supportive environment for healing.

To address this critical problem, we are requesting the funding to establish Peer Respite centers across CT. Peer Respite centers are spaces in which individuals facing crises can receive support and care from their peers in the community who have lived experience navigating crises. Early research has shown that Peer Respite Centers can not only provide a safe option that leaves a positive impact on individuals experiencing emotional distress (Bellamy et al., 2017), but also reduce the number of hospitalizations due to mental health crises (Bouchery et al., 2018).

We are requesting one Peer Respite center in each of the five DMHAS regions. We project needing \$6 million for year one, and \$5 million annually thereafter to sustain the centers. Importantly, this investment in our communities would cost significantly less than the cumulative annual cost of emergency visits and psychiatric hospitalizations. If Connecticut is to institute Peer Respite centers, we would join 18 other states in our country that have taken the critical step toward investing in a new future for mental health care. I hope we can take this step.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please reach out with any questions.

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## References

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- Saleh, A. Z., Appelbaum, P. S., Liu, X., Scott Stroup, T., & Wall, M. (2018). Deaths of people with mental illness during interactions with law enforcement. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry, 58*, 110–116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2018.03.003>