



Advocacy and Action
for Connecticut's
Mental Health

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
March 2, 2021
DMHAS BUDGET HEARING
H.B. No. 6439 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING
APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.
Sarah Lombardo**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee

My name is Sarah R. Lombardo, and I have a MSW in Community Organization. My face should be familiar by now, as I have come for the past few years to testify for my place of work, Reliance Health's Teamworks Clubhouse. I also, by the way, am a voter and I vote for those who work for those I serve, the underprivileged with mental illnesses.

Teamworks is a place Pre and Post-Covid-19, where our members can get a hot meal, a cup of coffee, some inspiration in a group, and skills to live by. It is a social mecca, where members feel safe, both physically and emotionally. Where a connection with staff and fellow participants can be made and people do not feel so alone, isolating at home with no with which to converse, a hospital stay looming on the horizon.

During Covid-19 we, the Teamworks Staff, have reached out to our members, sharing a bit of companionship with them, be it in on the phone, on a hike, or to dine outside. The members really have appreciated the time taken, just to make them smile.

On the basic needs level, we have joined forces with another program at our agency, Penobscot Place, in putting together food bags for all in need. We have also put together activity packets full of Word

Searches, crossword puzzles, playing cards, and a little candy, for a stimulating treat during the dull days of Covid-19.

Our members have access to a food bag every two weeks, and they are always grateful when we drop one off at their door. The activity packets have been in less demand; and we have tried to meet all needs.

Up and coming, I personally, just wrote and won a grant for tablets so that 46 members are able to join groups we are offering virtually including a political advocacy group that I will be running.

Exciting times for folks we serve, and I'm so proud to be part of it. Hearing members say, " I miss the clubhouse; I need to get connected with people..," also, knowing what a positive impact the clubhouse makes on the members lives, keeping them free and clear of hospitalization, really brings it home that we need your funding.

Also, we are asking the legislature for six million dollars the first year, and five million in subsequent years for the starting and continuing operation of five peer respites. We ask that five respites be allocated one per DMHAS region and be staffed by persons with lived experience in the mental health field and certified in Intentional Peer Support.

Thank you for all you do and for hearing my testimony.

What is a peer respite?

A peer respite is an alternative support for individuals who are in distress. A peer respite is a voluntary, short term overnight support for up to a week that is in a home-like environment—usually a residence—with all trained peer workers. Peer support is the main service provided in a peer respite.

Peer respites also:

- Are voluntary and self-referred. Not an alternative to homeless shelters.
- Do not provide medical services, such as prescribing medication or medication management.
- Often serve as hospital diversions. Emergency care is the most expensive form of care. Will save the state large amounts of money.
- Offer one on one and group peer support, sometimes with additional learning opportunities and supports.
- Empower people to discover what is best for their wellness.
 - Are trauma-informed and rooted in recovery values.