



**United Services, Inc.**

*Creating healthy communities*

**Public Hearing on:**

**H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.**

**Health Subcommittee**

**Tuesday, March 2, 10:00 am**

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

**I am Diane Manning, President and CEO of United Services, Inc.**

United Services is the Local Mental Health Authority for 21 towns in Northeastern Connecticut. We are a nonprofit organization providing more than 30 programs to our community, including Outpatient Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment, Family Programs, and Crisis Services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.

A year ago, our world went into lockdown. United Services did not, as we knew that we were vital to the survival of our clients and communities. That has not changed.

I would like to tell you about the resilience of our staff, who have continued to come to work every day of this pandemic. They have adapted and innovated to meet the community need – one that is continuing to grow at an alarming rate – during these unprecedented times. They do this for a shockingly low pay rate. They have worked every day of this pandemic and they deserve to be rewarded for that.

Despite the barriers our staff and we as an agency have faced, we have been here and will continue to be here every day for our clients. I want take that role one step further – in drawing attention to a service system that is severely lacking here in northeastern Connecticut and advocating for one that can better support our hardworking staff and serve our community.

Because the crisis is not over. We are seeing much higher stress levels in our clients. We are seeing more anxiety and depression, substance abuse and domestic violence. And we are seeing a huge increase, more than 230%, in people in crisis.

I ask that you add back the funding that has been effectively cut from the service system over years of no increases, estimated at \$461 million over 5 years, to the budget to bring these vital services back to funding levels from more than a decade ago. I ask that you support existing services that have been underfunded for years, including staff providing critical services.

I also ask that you recognize that the mental health, substance abuse, child abuse and domestic violence effects of this pandemic are likely to last long after herd immunity is reached. We need to expand, not contract services for everyone in our communities.

We have learned how quickly things can turn from “normal” to crisis. We are in crisis in the behavioral health service system. We ask that you fund us to properly enable the dedicated community organizations and their staff to respond, and to pay them as the vital services for their communities that they really are.

Thank you.