



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

Wednesday, March 3, 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. It is what we do, because the crisis is not over. We are seeing much higher stress levels in our clients. The children and families that come to us for help need so much more than reassurance or even therapy, as their lives have been disrupted, their expectations and routines dismantled, and their safety net shredded. We are seeing more anxiety and depression, substance abuse and domestic violence. We are working with schools on truancy issues, and with families to deal with the demands of school and childcare disruption, job loss and fear for the future. The children and families we see deserve to have the supports that they need to thrive, not just survive.

None of this support comes without a cost, but the decision to do nothing comes at the risk of a great cost to our citizens and society.

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 first support existing services that have been underfunded for years, including staff providing critical services. It is important that increases continue into the future, and are indexed to inflation after funding has been corrected to ensure that services remain in place to support our communities.

The proposed budget for DCF includes cuts to services at a time when we know, and you know, that need is increasing, not decreasing. That is not reasonable. Please restore funding to existing programs, and recognize that more is needed, not less.

The budget for DSS does not include enhanced Medicaid rates, though increases in the FMAP are expected, but are shown as income in the General Fund. Medicaid funds many of the treatment services that are essential for clients in the community. We need those funds to support services and the professionals who provide them. Please reinvest in community treatment and supports by increasing rates, and therefore access to 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 community, and with the services that so many vulnerable children and families rely on. 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.