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DATE: March 2, 2021

TO: Appropriations Committee, Health Subcommittee

FROM: Melanie Meyers, Clinical Case Manager at Gilead Community Services

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 distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Melanie Meyers and I am a clinical case manager within Gilead Community Services in Middletown. I provide in-home rehabilitative care to individuals experiencing serious mental health illness under the Mental Health Waiver program known as WISE.

I sincerely appreciate this opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439, An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 13, 2023.

I am here to respectfully request the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. Please: commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026; appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2022, a 7% increase; index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future, and lastly, hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19.

The need for mental health and substance abuse treatment has grown significantly throughout the pandemic and is expected to continue to grow as we emerge from it. Agencies like Gilead have stepped into this need and met the challenges head on. Throughout the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of state residents have depended on the non-profit provider system for essential services that can mean the difference between life and death.

My clients in the WISE program have struggled through the isolation of the pandemic which is worsening their mental health and largely decreasing opportunities for support in their community. They are unable to receive visits from family, participate in community programming due to COVID-19 restrictions, and are isolated from others around them even more than before. Their prolonged mental health and physical disabilities prevent them from engaging in daily activities and leaving their homes, especially during a pandemic. Furthermore, our program has lost many staff due to the pandemic, severing relationships clients built with those providing care. Now is the time they need the extra support from staff to help them through their daily lives and provide safe opportunities for interaction.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the impact of inadequate funding for nonprofit services. Due to budget cuts and chronic underfunding, I have seen decreased programming, decreased staffing levels and reduced client capacity. There has also been a lack of salary increases to essential employees providing to isolated and vulnerable individuals during a pandemic. Many of my clients cannot leave their home without staff support. They need clothes, food, and water, but require staff support for these necessities. Underfunding means less mileage allotted to staff to bring clients around or out of town for necessities, a lack of staff to provide for basic needs such as assistance cleaning homes, meal prep, or navigating medical issues, and lastly, those in need of our services are going unnoticed and not receiving help due to client capacity and lack of intake. Ultimately, the true cost is in the years and lives lost to untreated mental health and addiction disorders. Our program needs more funding.

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. They are what make Connecticut a great place to live and work. Our clients deserve to survive through this pandemic, and while staff is working hard to provide, we need the support of funding to continue.

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!

And, finally, please hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impacts of COVID-19!

Thank you distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to speak.

Respectfully,

Melanie Meyers
Clinical Case Manager
Gilead Community Services

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