

DATE: March 2, 2021

TO: Appropriations Committee, Health Subcommittee

FROM: Laura Patey, Board Chair, 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 Laura Patey and I am the Chair of the Board of Directors of Gilead Community Services in Middletown. Gilead has provided a full continuum of Mental Health & Addiction services in Middlesex County for 50 years and more recently expanded services into Hartford County.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439, An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 13, 2023.

I am testifying today on behalf of our over 2000 program participants, the 300 dedicated staff members, and the thousands of community members who support and benefit from the services we provide. I am here for one reason and that is to ask, as others have before me, for you to appropriate \$461 million over the next five years based on the plan that has been outlined by the CT Nonprofit Alliance. In the midst of the COVID pandemic, it has become even clearer to many in our communities, just how important the services are that are provided by Gilead. It is vital that you work *with* us to protect and fully fund the essential services that organizations like Gilead provide to the community!

Nonprofits, such as Gilead, were already stretching beyond their capacity and now are faced with the challenge of caring for an increased number of people who are dealing with mental health and substance abuse issues. This issue is so important to me, for beyond serving on the Board of Gilead, my family has had direct experience with the devastation that can result from a lack of adequate community services. As one of six children, I have experienced the impact that untreated mental health issues and substance abuse can wreak on a family. I have lost two brothers who struggled with mental health and substance abuse issues and did not have access to the supports and services that they needed. I have committed my personal and professional life to doing what I can to ensure that other families do not have to deal with these unavoidable losses.

Over the past 14 years, community nonprofits in Connecticut have lost at least \$461 million in state funding by not keeping pace with inflation or effectively covering increased costs associated with the ever increasing demand for services. Based on the detailed analysis that has been completed by the CT Nonprofit Alliance, we know what we have lost financially.

These losses have resulted in decreased programing, decreased staffing levels and reduced client capacity in several critical programs while the need for these essential services is clearly on the rise. Gilead has been unable to provide the types of salary increases to employees that are deeply deserved. Ultimately, the true cost is in the years and lives lost to untreated mental health and addiction disorders. I am asking you to consider the impact and to recognize, like so many of us already do, that this is not okay. We need to do better. I have a quote taped to my laptop as a constant reminder for me – it is, “What we are not changing, we are choosing”. Are you willing to make these critical changes and to appropriate the funds necessary to fund our community nonprofits? We are counting on you!

I would like to extend to each of you, the opportunity to visit (virtually or in person, when we are able), some of Gilead's programs and see the important work that is happening every day. It is amazing to see the transformative power of consistent services offered by dedicated staff. Please join us in supporting this important work.