



Scott Brabant
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee, Health Subcommittee, regarding:

H.B. 6439 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTEENTH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

**Public Hearing
Tuesday, March 2 ~ 10:00 am**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Luis Perez and I wish to share comments in regards to H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.

As President and CEO of Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), a 113-year-old nonprofit, and a board member of The Alliance: The Voice of Community Nonprofits and board member for Mental Health America, I am here to express my concern on our state budget, and to explain how funding for essential community services, across the system of care, will impact the more than 1,000 people we serve daily, our dedicated staff, and the community partners who are critical to our work.

As you gather insight and data today to make critical decisions on the budgets for DMHAS and other critical state agencies, please know that as discretionary funding, these departments are not fixed costs in the budget and are continually at risk.

While MHC's budget is at the mercy of "discretionary" funding, the services we provide are not optional. Our staff are essential workers who provide a service for individuals who are seeking long-term health wellness and independence from higher levels of care. Funding MHC, and our fellow non-profits, is an investment in the State of Connecticut that we can no longer afford to ignore.

I am here to respectfully request that 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
- Hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19



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In the proposed DMHAS budget, please:

- Support the \$6.3 million increase in Discharge & Diversion Services. Community nonprofits can help people avoid most costly care (EDs, jails, or shelters) and get them on a path toward recovery
- Make recovery support a priority in Connecticut. The need for mental health and substance abuse treatment services is expected to grow significantly as we emerge from the pandemic. Now is the time to invest in substantial improvements and enhancements to the behavioral health system, and this is not the time to flat-fund the DMHAS budget

As Connecticut continues to be siloed in its funding, please consider that MHC works within a complex system of care. One of the most debilitating consequences of funding cuts, is that when some of our fellow nonprofits face budget challenges it impacts our ability to do our best work. If other nonprofit agencies are subject to funding cuts, it creates an inability for all of us to work together to support our staff, recipients, and families. The result is that people pay by forfeiting an improved quality of life, and sometimes their life, especially if they are at risk of experiencing homelessness, not receiving care, or many of other vulnerable situations that any of us can find ourselves in.

As you have heard or will hear over the coming weeks from many employees, program participants, and advocates (from judicial to housing and education to developmental disabilities), we respectfully request that the legislature appropriate the **full \$461 million over five years** for community nonprofits.

The health and wellbeing of our friends and neighbors are at stake, as is the future of our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your continued service to Connecticut.

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
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