

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

Testimony before the CT Appropriations Committee on Governor's FY 2022-2023 proposed budget for Health Agencies

To the CT Appropriations Committee,

My name is Jamielle Rancourt and I am a registered voter from New Haven, CT. I am writing to testify on the state budget in regards to DHMAS. I am a CT native and Physician Assistant working in Hartford. I understand directly the burden that is currently being placed on the healthcare system, especially during this time of COVID-19 and increasing mental health struggles.

I have been encouraged by the discussion at the state level on how we response to people in crisis. This discussion allows us to evaluate what is and what is not working in our current system. Currently, when a person is in crisis, 911 is called and the person is taken, by police and ambulance, to the Emergency Department, our most expensive form of care. An important step in improving this system is not only changing who responds to crisis, but where people go when they are in crisis.

I ask the appropriations committee to consider the role of Peer Respite in our mental health response. Peer respites are places staffed with people with lived experience who support individuals through crisis. It is an affordable, safe, and person-centered alternative to the Emergency Department and psychiatric hospitalization. Connecticut is one of two states in the Northeast that does not have at least one Peer Respite. In my learning about Peer Respite, I have seen the success of various models such as Afiya in Western Massachusetts and Pathways in Vermont. These peer respites are examples of how not only does the peer respite improve outcomes for individuals in crisis, but reduces the burden on hospitals and overall costs.

In my personal experience, it has not been the healthcare system that has helped me get through my mental health struggles, but the support from peers who have been through crisis as I have. I hope more folks are able to experience the healing that comes from peer-led crisis response and support, rather than the violence and coercion that many experience with police and the current psychiatric model.

Currently, 18 states have invested in Peer Respite as part of their offerings to individuals in crisis. In this moment, Connecticut has the opportunity to re-evaluate and expand how we care for people in crisis. We are requesting Peer Respite center in each of the five DMHAS regions. To start up, we estimate that we would need \$6 million in the first year, and \$5 million annually to sustain them. This would be an investment in our communities and would decrease use of emergency rooms and need of mental health services over time.

Thank you for your consideration. Please reach out with any questions.

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