

**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**  
**Tuesday, March 2, 10:00 am**

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

My name is Kristine Seifert and I am the Transitional Living House Program Manager, with United Services, Inc. I work with young adults between 18 and 25 year old that have severe persistent mental illness. Our role in YAS (Young Adult Services Program) is to prepare young adults to live in independently in the community.

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.

I am here to respectfully **request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits.**

United Services is an essential healthcare provider and we have remained open throughout the pandemic. I have continued to work with clients to support them in our Transitional Living House and in the community.

We are continuing to see the impacts of COVID-19 across all of our programs. Some of our programs are currently operating at a more than 200 percent increase in services compared to the same month in 2019.

Our programs have been chronically underfunded, and our staff who provide critical services to our community are alarmingly underpaid. I have worked with staff members that because of their low wage are eligible for the same entitlements as the clients we serve. I manage staff members now that are paid within cents of the same wage that they started at when they came to USI more than 4 years ago. We are soon facing a time when the minimum wage will surpass what these direct care workers are being paid? What do I say to them?

We have young adults in our program who have been significantly impacted by staff turnover due to low pay. Some of these young adults have had more than 6 case managers in 3 years. Since we are a long term program providing wrap around services it is important for us to maintain continuity of care. This can't be done if people are leaving only after a few short months of employment or because the quality of employee we can hire is diminished because of low pay.

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, not to time to flat-fund the DMHAS budget.

Please support the \$6.3 million increase in Discharge & Diversion Services. Community nonprofits, such as United Services, help people avoid most costly care (EDs, jails, or shelters) and get them on a path toward recovery. We need these resources to respond to the needs in our community.