

**Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.**

My name is Peter Tuccitto. I am a registered voter in East Hartford and I am here to testify regarding **H.B. No. 6439 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

In 1999 I experienced the onset of a chronic mental illness know as Bipolar Disorder. Yet, it took over 2 years for the “experts” to finally fit me with the diagnosis. Over the past 22 years through many psychiatrist, APRNs, Psychologist, Primary Care Providers, In-Patient Psychiatric stays, and Intensive Outpatient Programs, I found that the traditional standard treatment provided me with abysmal results.

I read and heard that treating Bipolar Disorder was so much more difficult to treat than other psychiatric disorders. That was often coming from the same “professionals” in the Behavior Health System whom I thought were supposed to help me. I took on the stigma, it beat me down, and gave me little hope for a future. The elements which finally helped me regain my mental and emotional wellbeing, now need to be given increased funding in the DMHAS budget.

1. DMHAS social rehab clubs for those suffering with mental illness and or addiction
2. Recovery Support Specialist positions on all the psychiatric wards in CT
3. Alternative psychiatric treatment providers (Yoga, Meditation, Art Therapy, Massage, etc.)
4. Peer Respite
5. Stable housing

Becoming involved in Common Ground, a DMHAS social rehab club, through a case worker at Intercommunity transformed my idea of what life with a chronic mental illness could be. I was introduced to the concept of being in recovery from a mental illness, not just managing it from one crisis to the next. I was given the opportunity to co-facilitate groups, get involved in activism, advocacy, and I earned the State of CT recognized Recovery Support Specialist certification. Doing all these things with my peers has given me a hope, a purpose, and a drive that keeps doing everything I can to maintain my mental and emotional wellbeing. Among these are alternative treatments such as art therapy, meditation, Yoga, sound therapy, and massage.

I also ask for five respites to be allocated, one per DMHAS region and be staffed by persons with lived experience in the mental health field and certified in Intentional Peer Support. I ask the legislature for six million dollars the first year, and five million in subsequent years for the starting and continuing operation of five peer respites. I know from personal experience that if this had been offered to me as an alternative to a psychiatric In-patient stay, I would have taken it. It can be scary and overwhelming being In-patient. I believe I would never have put off getting help if this option were available to me at the time.

Finally, I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor’s budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

- I support the proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services’ Housing Supports and Services line at \$23.4 million in each year of the biennium.
- I request a new targeted investment of \$2.25 million in the DMHAS’ Housing Supports and Services line to provide supportive services to 300 households in scattered-site and development units.

- I request \$375,000 in new funding in the DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line for enhanced outreach services that would enable us to better identify individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. I support the Governor's proposal to provide an additional \$4 million in FY22 and \$7.2 million in FY23 in DMHAS for continued discharges from Connecticut Valley Hospital, including 30 new Money Follows the Person placements.
- I request the addition of \$352,500 in each year of the biennium for wrap-around services for 47 individuals anticipated to receive federal HUD Mainstream vouchers during FY22.
- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance proposal to restore \$461 million over five years to community nonprofits. Funding for nonprofits, including those working to end homelessness, does not adequately cover increased costs and demands for services.

Since 2012, the number of people utilizing Connecticut's shelter system has decreased by 57%. Investing in proven solutions to homelessness is necessary in continuing our progress and ensuring that every youth, family, and individual has a safe, stable place to call home.

Thank you for reading to my testimony today.