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March 2, 2021
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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Brian Williams and I am currently a Substance Abuse Counsellor with 9 years of state service.

I am here to respectfully request that you allocate \$6.3 million dollars to expand addictions services. There are people in our state currently with a medical need for treatment. Before this pandemic that currently preoccupies us, we had an epidemic. It has not stopped. It is getting worse. Before the pandemic, we had a need to expand services, and while the pandemic continues, the need is greater. We've seen a 22% increase in overdose deaths in CT since the start of the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, CVH was operating 110 beds in Middletown at Merritt Hall. We had a waiting list then. Currently we are operating 32 beds, and the waiting list is longer.

In an addict's journey, there are only a few moments where the addict accepts treatment. Denial is part of the illness. When an addict gets to the point where they are willing to accept treatment, that window is very short. When parents or family of an addict call for treatment, and we tell them there is not a bed, we lose critical opportunities to reach out to people and get them into treatment. People die every day from this illness.

Recently, I've had the experience of sitting in the screening office at CVH watching our members have to tell folks calling in that they can't fit them in, but they can go to the state website to check other places. Most of the time, if someone is calling us, it's because there is nowhere else available.

We have an opportunity to invest in our residents, and the services that help save lives. We need to restore capacity to pre-pandemic levels, but we also need more beds. Merritt hall has the available units, but even before the pandemic we were not utilizing them. DMHAS just needs the funding from the state to hire around 100 positions – 38 nurses, 60 direct care staff, and 14 clinical staff to restore our capacity to 110 beds and operationalize 30 more.

I came to the United States as a 19 year old with dreams of going to business school to be an international banker, and I got a job at a group home with some emotionally troubled boys. It changed my life and helped me to understand my own life, but most important, it helped me to realize how deep my passion was for this work. They taught me a lot. I stay in state service because we are able to help people transform their lives. Prioritizing recovery by investing in DMHAS will save lives. We all deserve an opportunity to do the next right thing, but we need the resources to be able to provide lifesaving care to our residents. Thank you for your time.