

The Legislative Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes

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Testimony By

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Senator Slossberg and Commission members, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you this afternoon. My name is Barry Kasdan and I have worked in Connecticut's non-profit Human Services sector since 1970. All of my professional work has involved state funded services for children and adults encompassing Mental Health and Addictions services. During the course of almost 30 years with state funded non-profit services I have seen little progress in improving agency outcomes through developing and enhancing agency efficiencies as they relate to the contracting and monitoring of non-profit human service contracts. If anything, contracting and monitoring of non-profit human service contracts has become more fragmented, burdensome, complex with increased unfunded mandates imposed on us.

As the Pres & CEO of a major state funded non-profit behavioral health agency I am here today to support the efforts of the Commission and urge careful deliberations on the many proposed areas of focus outline in your preliminary report. I was honored to be asked by Senator Slossberg to participate in one of the early workgroups that brought non-profit executives and state agency leaders to the table. That process enhanced my understanding of the complexity of the issues and the historical resistance that resides in systems and state agencies that have existed and grown in their own separate worlds.

State agencies have developed cumbersome administrative, fiscal and data systems that cannot talk to each other resulting in agencies like Bridges reporting separately and very differently to each one. Monthly, quarterly and year end auditing and reporting is done as if we were funded by different states rather than departments within one state. Revamping, reconfiguring and developing new data and IT systems by state agencies is done without any apparent oversight that would require consistent standards and formats to assure integration of information for efficient reporting from agencies like Bridges. Some of the newest systems work with poor and inaccurate data causing needless effort, time and cost to us to correct data and monitor how it is analyzed.

These are but a few of the frustrations and wasted efforts during a time when budgets are being cut and we can ill afford to waste time and resources that take away from providing direct care to our clients.

There are so many issues and points in this preliminary report that need to be addressed. Many need further deliberation with non-profit providers. I would urge an ongoing work group that could act as a resource and focus group for your work. CCPA and other trade association would be more than willing to assist.

I would like to point out that more time and attention needs to be focused on the balance and funding between non-profit and state operated human services. Connecticut stands out as one of the states that still have a large volume of community based care in the hands of its state operated agencies. Item 27 in this report focuses on maximizing funding for outpatient services for state operated and contracted providers. As you know fees collected through state operated treatment programs are not reinvested in those programs but go into the general operating budget of the state. This makes no sense. More importantly it makes no sense that the state of Connecticut is in the business of providing mental health and substance outpatient treatment services to its citizens. Your community based system of licensed and accredited agencies should be doing that work not the state. With maximizing federal revenue by billing Medicaid and private third party insurance we can leverage those resources and expand desperately needed outpatient services in our communities.

The preliminary report is a great start. But we are so pressed at this time with lost funding and budget cuts. I would suggest that a "short List" be developed to try and address the fiscal crisis facing your community agencies today. Such a list should focus on initiatives that could be implemented in 12-18 months or less. Enhancing agency outcomes through developing efficiencies and integration of administrative functions could free up tens of millions of dollars, as this preliminary report suggests. Carefully assessing what your non-profits do best and what your state operated agencies do best can lead to a better funding allocation process. The critical question is whether we have the will and commitment to make the tough decisions, which go against decades of resistance and the absence of strategic planning to implement sound policy.

The work you have embarked on can be a new beginning.