

***Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
Governor's Midterm Budget Adjustments FY 2009  
DMHAS Budget  
Wednesday, February 13, 2008***

My name is Claire Phelan. I live in Milford, Connecticut. I am the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Bridges...A Community Support System Inc. The Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Department of Children and Families designated Bridges as their lead agency for adults and children to provide mental health and addictions services to the residents of Milford, Orange, West Haven and surrounding communities.

I came this evening to support the need for adequate funding to community nonprofits such as Bridges. In my community of Milford, our agency is now turning away or placing on waiting lists 20-30 residents a week who seek our help. Our situation has become desperate!

I have many years of volunteer advocacy experience serving on local, regional and state boards and committees. The more involved I became, the more I came to understand the challenges that face our clients daily as they struggle with set backs in life situations and for many a disabling illness. My resolve became to consciously not make their struggle more difficult because of my attitude or actions. I decided to work on their behalf and advocate for needed services in the community.

I have observed that you share my resolve as well. I appreciate that you examine all aspects of the issues and invest many hours listening and hearing from your constituents. In spite of our good intent, there is still a desperate need for quality services in our communities for thousands of residents struggling with the daily challenges from mental illness and substance abuse.

There was much hope and promise for clients leaving the state hospitals a decade ago. Recovering clients living in the community, receiving community services lived that promise.

However, it is a dismaying fact that community providers have been woefully underfunded seriously risking the mental and physical health of your neighbors and mine, our friends and family members.

The Governor's newly proposed budget and the two-year budget approved last session by this legislature does not even allow for a cost of living increase next year for our nonprofit agencies.

It does not allow for the number of folks put on a waiting list to access services. It does not recognize that providers need to cut staff in order to save dollars to meet escalating costs.

The proposed budget does not address the causes that have created the need for more hospital emergency beds, more psychiatric beds and more beds in the Department of Corrections. It is known by most that resources provided for community services give new life to our clients while at the same time provide an enormous financial savings to the towns, cities and the state by diverting and reducing the need for high cost solutions.

I urge you, I implore you to make this session be the time that the promise is kept, hope is restored, the system is stabilized and together we provide long-term solutions.

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