



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION
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TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 13, 2008

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Merrill, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sheila Amdur, co-chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition, and I am here today to testify about the DMHAS budget.

- The recently passed Criminal Justice Reform bill only funds the probation side of the mental health diversionary program, but it did not address the increased clinical mental health and housing services necessary to support this population in the community. The program cannot work without these critical funds. This program not only enables people with mental illness who have committed low level misdemeanors to access needed treatment and housing (which helps reduce recidivism), it also frees up beds for violent criminals that need to be incarcerated. Legislators realized the importance of passing the mental health diversionary program in the Special Session. Neglecting to fund the other half of the mental health diversionary program ensures failure, something the state cannot afford.
- There is a desperate need for the expansion of Young Adult Services (YAS) Programs statewide to reach the remaining areas with no existing services. It is critical to ensure that young adults, who are at a critical life stage, receive timely, age-appropriate supports and services. Many are experiencing their first episode of serious mental illness or transitioning from the DCF system. You have wisely implemented these services in many areas of the State. Please ensure that all young adults in the State of Connecticut have access to appropriate services, regardless of where they live.
- We support funding to better screen and divert people with mental illness from nursing homes, and are pleased that the Governor's budget begins to address this issue. It is critical that we serve individuals in community settings rather than in long-term care facilities as appropriate. We would like to see additional procedures in place for those individuals that are deemed appropriate for nursing home admission, such as recovery plans and procedures for accountability surrounding implementation, always with an emphasis on striving for the goal of community integration, whenever that may be.

- Please fund 650 new units of Supportive Housing in this year's budget. Supportive Housing is a proven solution for many people with serious mental illnesses to be able to sustain a meaningful life in the community. Housing is the crucial cornerstone in mental health treatment. Without a stable, safe and affordable place to live, recovery is difficult. Many communities are joining in the effort to establish 10 year plans to eliminate homelessness. We CAN eliminate homelessness with proven solutions like Supportive Housing. The supply of willing builders greatly outpaces funding. Addressing homelessness is the cornerstone of addressing a broad array of costly human service challenges, such as criminal justice recidivism, untreated substance abuse and mental health needs, overcrowded emergency rooms, unemployment, and costly nursing home stays and hospitalizations. 650 units is the amount that would make a difference now. Please make a proven, cost-effective investment in Connecticut today.
- Finally, I would like to mention that Keep the Promise supports efforts to ensure adequate funding for nonprofit providers. A 9% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) will prevent the further erosion of basic community mental health and substance abuse services in our state.

Thank you for your time tonight. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.