

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Senate & House Republican members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding
Committee, May 11, 2015**

COMMENTS

Regarding the proposed Appropriations budget and Finance package

Good afternoon Senate and House Republican members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals who live with mental health conditions and parents and family members of individuals living with mental health conditions. I am writing to you today in regards to the proposed Appropriations Committee budget and Finance Committee package.

We can probably all agree on some things: no one wants to see new taxes, but we want to have a fair tax system. This system will generate enough resources to protect and provide funding for critical and vital services and supports and meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens, including constituents who live with mental health concerns. Not providing these essential services, including community based and legal services, will cost the state considerably more by forcing individuals to end up in more expensive settings such as emergency rooms, hospitals, prisons or homeless. The Appropriations Committee budget protects and restores most of the crucial social and human services our neighbors, friends and family members rely on, and was matched with a comprehensive plan by the Finance Committee to promote balance and equity in our tax system (for example by eliminating costly tax exemptions on computer and data processing services; expanding the sales and use tax to services primarily used by people with higher incomes and large corporations, e.g., engineering services and general management consulting services, while allocating a considerable amount of such revenues to cities and towns to reduce property taxes and generally reducing the sales and use tax; increasing the top rate for high-income earners, which is still less than our neighboring states).

Both Committees have made difficult decisions in a difficult budget environment, while recognizing the state's responsibility to care for our neighbors who have high needs. The Republican plan as submitted, seems to be unrealistic as it relies largely on labor savings of state employees who have collective bargaining agreements that aren't up for re-opening at this time. Relying on what may be savings down the road for issues that are happening right now, is not a solution. What Connecticut is facing right now, are difficult tradeoffs, and without additional revenue from the Finance Committee package, many individuals who rely on vital mental health and other services to maintain their wellness and recovery and live in the community, will lose those services. While no one wants new taxes, we cannot afford the short and long-term damage that will be done if we do not support additional revenues. We ask you to work together, with us and with your fellow lawmakers across all aisles as you have done before to do the right thing for our neighbors, friends and family members who need essential services.

Thank you for your time, attention and continuous work. Respectfully, Daniela Giordano