



DATE: February 4, 2019
TO: Public Health Committee
FROM: Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance
RE: H.B. No. 5145 An Act Concerning a Study of Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg Senator Somers, Representative Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofits, with a membership of more than 300 community organizations and associations. Nonprofits deliver essential services to more than half a million people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

The Alliance supports H.B. No. 5145 An Act Concerning a Study of Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations and requests statutory language to define the Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations, or "RBHAOs."

RBHAOs were to serve as consolidated Regional Action Council (RAC) and Regional Mental Health Board (RMHB) system. What had been six RMHBs and 15 RACs merged into five new RBHAOs. Traditionally, RMHBs and RACs served many functions. They provided important independent oversight over both the State and private providers, provided a space for people with lived experience and their families to advocate and have input in the design of the behavioral health system, were local administrators of prevention programs, and provided critical community input necessary for a myriad of federal funding opportunities.

The roles and responsibilities of the RACs and RMHBs were set by the legislature--the RACs in Chapter 319j section 17a-671 and the RMHBs in Chapter 319i section 17a-484. Currently, the RBHAOs authority is set in their contracts with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. While that relationship is important and collaborative, The Alliance requests the legislature provide statutory authority to these new entities consistent with that of their predecessors.

Because much of the RBHAO funding is primarily provided through the federal block grant, they are understandably focused on the important work of prevention. The RMHBs played an essential role evaluating services and providing a voice to consumers and others with lived experience. Without statutory language formalizing these roles, The Alliance is concerned both of these important functions will be lost.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.