



Date: March 14, 2022
To: Public Health Committee
From: Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations, The Alliance
Re: H.B. 5430 An Act Concerning Opioids

Good morning, Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Senator Hwang, Representative Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations for the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance. The Alliance is the statewide organization representing the nonprofit sector. Community nonprofits provide essential services to over half a million individuals and families in Connecticut every year and employ 115,000 Connecticut workers, improving the quality of life in communities across the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 5430 An Act Concerning Opioids. We appreciate the legislature's focus on mental health and substance abuse treatment this year, but we urge the Committee to use this and other legislation to move the needle forward.

Specifically, we support Section 6 of this bill, which would increase the availability of take-home methadone for people recovering for opioid addiction. The expansion of take-home methadone treatment was necessitated by the pandemic in 2020 and providers found it to be effective. Methadone is highly regulated by the state and federal government and continuing to allow take-home methadone treatment would be a positive step.

More broadly, however, Connecticut does not have the luxury of time to address the opioid crisis in Connecticut. For behavioral health services, legislative commitment to increase funding is needed now more than ever, as opioid overdose deaths have skyrocketed during the pandemic. We want to be clear: **There is no way to address the gaps in the mental health system without addressing the chronic underfunding of the existing services provided by nonprofits.**

Connecticut's community nonprofits, which provide opioid addiction recovery treatment across the state, find themselves at a confluence of problems that taken together equal a nonprofit sector in crisis:

- Nonprofits were, at the beginning of last year, **\$461 million – 28% – behind inflation** since 2007;

- **Two years of covid exacerbated the impact of inadequate funding** and brought unanticipated, unbudgeted costs and operational challenges for most community nonprofits;
- The 4% increase in the current year was quickly absorbed by rising costs. Over the last year, **inflation rose by almost 6%**, surpassing the COLA that is in the current year's budget;
- Adding to this is a **workforce crisis** the likes of which our members have never seen. A recent survey we did found that, of the 70 nonprofit respondents:
 - 91% said it has been difficult or extremely difficult to recruit employees this past year;
 - The average vacancy rate is 18%;
 - 68% report increased demand, meaning;
 - 59% have waiting lists for things like opioid treatment, shelter, respite care and help for people returning to their communities after incarceration.

While we appreciate the intent of the bill, we respectfully request the legislature act swiftly to address the current funding and workforce crisis in Connecticut's behavioral health system.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.