**Testimony of Victoria Veltri**
**State Healthcare Advocate**
**Before the Appropriations Committee**
**Governor's Budget Proposal**
**March 6, 2015**

Good evening, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron, and members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate ("OHA"). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health insurance plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Governor's Human Service budget proposal. There is no question that the budget climate is extremely difficult this year. However, I must oppose many of the proposed cuts in the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) budget, as I believe that they will create an impediment to our state's efforts to achieve increased access to care, develop responsive care models and improved quality of care.

**Reducing Funding for the Regional Action Councils**

Regional Action Councils (RAC) serve a critical function in our communities, fostering a very productive and collaborative partnership of community leaders to develop behavioral health services in each region that are responsive to the needs of the citizens that they

represent. RACs provide invaluable insight into the unique needs of each subregion, applying their local knowledge to best identify areas where behavioral health awareness, education and prevention initiatives are most needed.

The funding reduction for the RACs in the Governor's proposed budget will significantly impact the ability of these organizations to effectively fulfill their mandate, and jeopardize the ability of communities and advocates to effectively continue the important work of raising awareness and promoting education of behavioral health issues in each region in a way that responds to the needs of local consumers. At a time when efforts to promote awareness of and access to behavioral health services, and initiatives for the transformation of our healthcare delivery system emphasize the importance and benefits of community based services and intervention, limiting these programs is contrary to the positive policy initiatives Connecticut has undertaken in recent years to tackle the deficits in our behavioral health system.

**Reducing Funding for the Regional Mental Health Boards**

The Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHB) represent another crucial tool in our efforts to promote consumer awareness of and access to behavioral health resources. These boards compliment the work of the RACs in important ways, and include consumers from each region, ensuring that citizens from across Connecticut may actively participate in the evaluation of each region and town's behavioral health needs. This model promotes the design and delivery of more cost effective services, with members from each component of the community sharing their insight into the distinctive needs.

The proposed reduction would essentially defund these crucial, community based and highly effective resources at a time when Connecticut is shifting the focus of its healthcare delivery system to be more community based. Without the invaluable support from the RMHBs, consumers will lose an important tool that supports the integral role that they play in their community's well being.

**Reducing Funding for the Legal Service**

The legal services community in Connecticut is one of the only options that many of our state's low income citizens have for legal assistance with many issues including education, housing, access to healthcare, employment, disability and many more. Without adequate funding, this trusted legal resource may have to limit these valuable services, restricting its ability to zealously advocate for and represent the needs and interests of those who would otherwise have no opportunity to be heard.

Although I understand that the challenges posed by this year's budget are significant, the reductions funding for these crucial programs jeopardizes the future benefits that each of them can deliver as integral parts of our state's initiative to promote expanded community based interventions, and I respectfully submit that these funds be restored.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHA's testimony today. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at victoria.veltri@ct.gov.