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November 19, 2015

Governor Dannel P. Malloy
Office of the Governor, State of Connecticut
State Capitol
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Malloy:

Together with the Board of Directors of the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board (ERMHB), I write in support of the efforts of United Services, Inc., Northeastern Connecticut's nonprofit Local Mental Health Authority, to secure state bonding assistance for the shovel-ready construction of a long-needed consolidated and expanded Windham Regional Clinical Center.

United Services has sought state support for this initiative since 2011. In addition to providing a long overdue facility expansion to allow the agency to meet the rising demand for services, this project will also allow United Services to co-locate children's behavioral health programs with services for their parents and other adults, improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of the region's mental health system.

Since 2007, the agency has experienced 248% growth in their volume of outpatient mental health services alone. United Services also provides vital supports as the regional Domestic Violence Program as well as other important human services including a new Center for Autism, not yet available to residents of the Windham region due to the agency's current inadequate facilities.

As members of the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board, we have a statutory mandate to advocate for behavioral health services that are appropriate and accessible for residents of the 39 towns in our region, and to ensure that those services promote overall health and wellness and a meaningful life in the community for people living with mental health challenges. Those with severe and persistent mental illnesses have a life span that is, on average, 25 years less than the average American's, largely due to treatable medical conditions. With the proper investment in integrated community mental health and primary healthcare, these individuals could lead full and productive lives.

In a recent evaluation of United Services' Outpatient Clinic, the ERMHB found that:

[The] Windham facility is dated, cramped, and lacks accessibility for those with physical disabilities. United Services appears to have made every possible effort to maximize space, despite the huge limitations presented by the building...

Ensuring privacy during clients' sessions is challenging. It is clear that the agency outgrew this building years ago, and until a pending bond request is approved, United Services is powerless to improve the situation...

Sadly, this situation exemplifies the very real stigma attached to mental health issues. United Services' inability to gain bond approval for its new building sends a distressing message that our communities don't value mental health services and the people who need them, increasing feelings of shame and isolation. This disconnect is quite apparent just down the hill, where a brand-new, state-of-the-art building occupied by Generations Family Health Care is located.

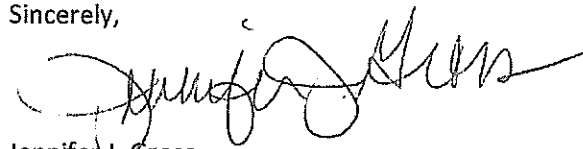
Furthermore, a recent Community Needs Assessment conducted by Hartford Healthcare determined that "Mental Health is the number one health priority in Eastern Connecticut."

The residents of Northeastern Connecticut are long overdue for a significant investment in community mental health services. As you noted in your charge to the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission: "We need to make sure that our mental health professionals have access to the resources and information they need to get treatment to those who need it." Throughout their final report, the Commission repeatedly describes the state's behavioral health system as "fragmented and underfunded" and consistently calls for the state to "find ways to fund integrated models of care for both children and adults."

The Board of Directors and membership of the ERMHB wholeheartedly echo that assessment, and support United Services in their efforts to address these deficiencies. By supporting United Services' request you can take immediate steps to improve, expand and consolidate services for children, adults and families in a region that is particularly lacking in resources for people with mental health needs.

We respectfully ask you to seriously consider and fully endorse United Services' eminently reasonable and appropriate request for the support necessary to serve the behavioral health needs of the residents of Northeastern Connecticut. Thank you for your prompt and thoughtful attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer L. Gross", written over a horizontal line.

Jennifer L. Gross
Executive Director