

**Testimony of Nancy Navarretta, MA, LPC, NCC, Commissioner  
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services  
Before the General Obligation Bonding Subcommittee  
March 20, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Miller, Representative Napoli, Senator Hwang, Representative Piscopo, and distinguished members of the General Obligation Bonding Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on ***SB 1247, An Act Authorizing and Adjusting Bonds of the State.***

DMHAS is a health care agency whose mission is to promote the overall health and wellness of adult persons with behavioral health needs through coordinated and comprehensive mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery supports. With over 3,400 employees and an almost \$1 billion annual budget, DMHAS serves almost 100,000 clients a year, operates two hospitals, manages a network of thirteen local mental health authorities, and partners with over 130 non-profit agencies that cover every region of the state.

The Governor's proposed capital budget for FYs 2026 and 2027 contains critical investments to continue the revitalization and enhancement of our facilities. The Department appreciates the Governor's support and looks forward to working with legislators as the session continues. In particular, DMHAS would like to highlight the following initiatives included in the capital budget:

- **A New Maximum-Security Hospital:** The proposed capital budget includes \$50 million in FY 2026 for the planning and design of a replacement for Whiting Forensic Hospital, the state's only maximum-security psychiatric hospital. The current building was constructed in 1966, and its poor design has been exacerbated by deferred maintenance and improvements, creating an atmosphere that is not conducive to health care and recovery. Connecticut needs a new forensic hospital to serve our residents, and this investment would begin planning and designing a facility for some of the most acute and complex behavioral health clients in the state.
- **Facility Repairs:** The Governor's proposal includes \$60 million for improvements over the biennium (\$20 million in FY 2026 and \$40 million in FY 2027) to our various facilities for client care and staffing needs. Our network includes 70 state owned and operated buildings, many of which were constructed several decades ago. Simply put, the facilities have fallen into disrepair, and this is a critical investment to ensure client and staff safety. Among the repairs these dollars would fund are: new roofs, HVAC upgrades, electrical overhauls, and exterior repairs to sidewalks, lighting, and points of ingress and egress.
- **Sprinkler Systems:** The proposed capital budget includes \$25 million (\$10 million in FY 2026 and \$15 million in FY 2027) for design and installation of new sprinkler, fire suppression, and fire alarm systems at our facilities; with a primary focus at our in-patient units in Bridgeport. Our current systems are antiquated and must be upgraded to ensure client and staff safety.

DMHAS has the following unallocated balances from previous authorizations:

- \$2,500,000 to begin the initial planning of the replacement of Whiting Forensic Hospital on the Middletown Campus

- \$15,369,500 for the design and begin construction of the sprinkler project at the DMHAS Southwest CT Mental Health System in Bridgeport as well as additional sprinkler projects at other DMHAS buildings
- \$39,826,678 for several fire, safety, and environmental improvement projects:
  - Inpatient buildings on the Middletown campus including: the cost and associated fees for the design of the renovation of inpatient units in Battell Hall, replacement of the passenger elevator at Merritt Hall, replacement of generator at Dutcher Hall, and
  - new fire alarm systems in multiple buildings
  - Upgrades to HVAC systems in Connecticut Mental Health Center in New Haven and the Southwest CT Mental Health System in Bridgeport
  - Roof projects at Capital Region Mental Health Center
- \$3,282,999 for Grants-in-Aid to Private Non-Profit Providers for purchases, repairs, alterations, and improvements at community based residential and outpatient facilities.

Thank you for your continued support of our agency's mission and we welcome the opportunity to answer any questions or elaborate further on any aspect of the proposed capital budget. For more information, please contact Chandra Persaud, DMHAS Legislative Program Manager, at [Chandra.Persaud@ct.gov](mailto:Chandra.Persaud@ct.gov).