

Testimony dated 11/21/07- Judiciary Committee
From Robert Weatherington, Residential Counselor –Chrysalis Center, Inc. (Greater Hartford)

Good Afternoon,

My name is Robert Weatherington and I am a Residential Counselor for Chrysalis Center, a nonprofit community organization located in the Greater Hartford area who serves individuals with mental illness, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and those retiring from incarceration and/or homelessness. I have worked in the field of social services for over 10 years and prior to that I too was once homeless and very involved with various parts of the criminal justice and court system. Having been on “both sides of the fence” (literally), I work in the field of criminal justice trying to help others turn their lives around as I did my own. I was fortunate enough to have community programs to turn to when released from prison and I used them to learn new ways to integrate back into society. I have recently worked in the Chrysalis Center Mental Health to Alternative to Incarceration, (MHAIC) program for over 2 years before the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services cut the funding but today I work in a case management program funded by DOC/CSSD and DMHAS. While this program is too new to discuss outcomes, I can tell you many stories of success from the MHAIC. I have provided a video in your packets that outlines many of the success stories when the program was operating.

One key issue outlined in the video is the notion of “a place to go where I can learn how to live again”. Again and again, my clients would tell me that if I didn’t have the Chrysalis MHAIC, I know that I would be back in jail or on the streets doing bad things.

I saw first hand in my work on how lives can be successfully transitioned by community programming versus costly institutionalized care that makes no sense to clients or taxpayers. I also realize that there have been some difficult and horrific crimes committed by people on parole and probation, but in reality we know about this because the media doesn’t focus on how an addict got clean and now works with schools instead of being in jail for drug possession. The media also doesn’t focus on the unmedicated schizophrenic turned their live around by getting a job at a local library instead of exposing himself in the park due to the voices from his undedicated illness. That’s because no one wants to believe that people like me and those I serve could be like you and me. Let’s face it, drug abuse and mental illness do not discriminate- most of you legislators know people as I have described but the one key to changing one’s life is having a program to turn to; having staff who understand where you have been and to keep you on the straight and narrow and if you slide backwards, someone to pick you back up and to believe you can be something more.

That is why I am here today: to ask you to please invest in community programming not costly institutions. Invest in human potential, invest in success and most importantly, invest in the future of our communities

Thank you