



**Scott Brabant**  
Board Chair

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President & CEO

## **Mental Health Connecticut: 2022 Legislative Session Wrap-Up**

### **Introduction:**

The 2022 Connecticut General Assembly Legislative Session began on February 9<sup>th</sup> and ended on May 4<sup>th</sup>. During the 2022 Legislative Session, lawmakers introduced and passed a variety of bills that aim to address many critical areas of mental health and well-being in the state of Connecticut.

Highlights of such areas of mental health that were addressed through legislation include: children's mental health, staffing shortages amongst human services providers, and unprecedented funding for providers of mental health services. In addition to mental health legislation, other critical legislation was passed that addresses property tax exemptions for community nonprofits, limiting the utilization of solitary confinement, amongst others. The 2022 session was a historic year for MHC as we accomplished many of our legislative priorities that will undoubtedly make a lasting impact on addressing the worsening mental health crisis in Connecticut.

Below is a brief statement regarding the historic budget passed by the Connecticut General Assembly. Also listed below are bills that Mental Health Connecticut advocated for during the duration of the 2022 Legislative Session.

### **Statement on Historic Budget:**

After more than a decade of underfunding, exacerbated by challenges to tax exemption, economic inflation, social injustice awareness, and a coronavirus pandemic that stressed frontline health workers at MHC and throughout the social service system, the urgent concerns of community nonprofits were heard and addressed by the general Assembly in 2021 and 2022.

"While it's rare for anyone to get everything that's requested, community nonprofits are the most successful interest group in the new budget. The budget provides \$92 million more than had been originally proposed. This includes \$72 million for most health/human services providers as proposed by the Appropriations Committee and \$20 million for I/DD providers that had not even been included in the Appropriations Committee proposal," said Luis Perez.

The General Assembly has approved \$330 million in increased funding for nonprofits over the biennium, including \$220.4 million in the FY 23 state budget that has been approved.

The \$24 billion budget adjustment for FY23, which Governor Lamont is expected to sign, includes \$220.4 million in new money for providers. The increase comes after a \$110.15 million increase in the FY22 budget, and before that, more than a decade of flat funding that left nonprofits \$460 million behind.



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MHC praises the hard work and dedication of legislative leadership and Governor Lamont to pass this unprecedented, historic budget that will undoubtedly make great steps towards properly funding CT's nonprofits that provide critical services to the residents of the state.

### **Bills that passed:**

#### **Senate Bill 1: "AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDHOOD MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH SERVICES IN SCHOOLS."**

**Legislative Intent:** Senate Bill 1, a massive bill that provides grants for school districts to hire and retain more school social workers and counselors, allows school nurses to administer opioid-reversal drugs to students, and permits local school boards to offer remote learning starting with the 2024-25 school year. The latter would enable students home sick from school, for example, to participate in online instruction. Another provision in the bill would provide grants to child care and early childhood providers to supplement employee salaries and address other needs.

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2022 for most bill provisions.

#### **Senate Bill 2: "AN ACT EXPANDING PRESCHOOL AND MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN."**

**Legislative Intent:** Senate Bill 2 will institute universal pre-K for all Connecticut children ages 3 and up, which would bring many benefits ranging from higher earnings to lower crime and unemployment, as well as better mental health outcomes in middle and high school.

These benefits, when aggregated, add up to more than \$83 million per year, especially when including the benefits that quality child care through pre-K has on increased maternal workforce participation.

In addition, Senate Bill 2 mandates later high school start times which will benefit the physical and mental health needs of students. Lack of sleep is incredibly common among high school students and is associated with severe risks including obesity, alcohol consumption, tobacco & drug use, and poor academic performance, as well as depression and mental health problems.

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2022 for most bill provisions.

#### **Senate Bill 450: "AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT VALLEY AND WHITING FORENSIC HOSPITALS."**

**Legislative Intent:** The purpose of Senate Bill 450 is to make various revisions to the statutes governing the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) and Whiting Forensic Hospital (formerly Whiting Forensic Institute)—CT's two publicly-funded psychiatric hospitals. This work is part of an effort in recent years to monitor patient rights and treatment while in state care, after long-term patient abuse at Whiting came to light in 2017.



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Senate Bill 450 also implements some of the recommendations of the task force established in the wake of the patient abuse findings at Whiting.

**Effective Date:** October 1, 2022

**Senate Bill 459: “AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSION FOR CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT, THE USE OF ISOLATED CONFINEMENT, SECLUSION, RESTRAINTS, STRIP SEARCHES, SOCIAL CONTACTS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS, TRANSPARENCY FOR CONDITIONS OF INCARCERATION AND CORRECTIONAL OFFICER TRAINING.”**

**Legislative Intent:** Senate Bill 459 is the revised PROTECT ACT, that has been promoted by the individuals from the Stop Solitary CT Coalition. Senate Bill 459 will limit the usage of solitary confinement in our jails and prisons, which has been found to have a huge and often permanent negative effects on the mental health of incarcerated people.

In addition to ensuring oversight and accountability, Senate Bill 459 also mitigates extreme isolation, ends misuse of lockdowns, promotes correctional officer wellness, and promotes overall transparency within the Connecticut correction system.

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2022

**House Bill 5001: “AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH.”**

**Legislative Intent:** House Bill 5001 includes 73 different sections with a slew of programs and funding. It will make license reciprocity possible for out-of-state providers, especially those who provide treatment for children. It also will set up a grant program for local and regional boards of education to hire additional school mental health specialists, and create a second grant program for school boards and operators of youth camps to help cover mental health services for students.

Under House Bill 5001, certain health plans would have to offer coverage for two mental health wellness examinations per year performed by a licensed mental health provider and waive the requirement for prior authorization. The measure also mandates that the state health care advocate designate an employee to handle services specific to minors, and launches a peer-to-peer mental health support program.

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2022 for most bill provisions.

**House Bill 5044: “AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR’S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE USE OF OPIOID LITIGATION PROCEEDS.”**

**Legislative Intent:** House Bill 5044 establishes an Opioid Settlement Fund as a separate non-lapsing fund administered by a 37-member Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee with assistance from the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services (DMHAS).



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Under the bill, the fund must contain certain moneys the state receives that are intended to address opioid use, related disorders, or the impact of the opioid crisis. This includes moneys (1) received from any judgment, consent decree, or settlement paid by any defendant that is finalized on or after July 1, 2021, and (2) related to opioid production, distribution, dispensing, and other opioid-related activities.

Moneys remaining in the fund at the end of a fiscal year remain in the fund and do not revert to the General Fund.

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2022

**House Bill 5168: " AN ACT CONCERNING PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR PROPERTY USED FOR CHARITABLE PURPOSES."**

**Legislative Intent:** House Bill 5168 makes several changes to the existing exemption statutes to clarify the legislature's intent to exempt from property taxes group homes for people with disabilities, substance abuse treatment centers, homeless shelters, domestic violence programs, and other residential programs.

House Bill 5168 also makes changes to the current process for determining exemptions, and adds language to cases where a charitable exemption denial could not have happened except by ignoring the law, allow nonprofits to collect legal fees from towns if they have been wrongly denied an exemption.

**Effective Date:** October 1, 2022