



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES**  
*A Healthcare Service Agency*

NED LAMONT  
GOVERNOR

MIRIAM E. DELPHIN-RITTMON, Ph.D.  
COMMISSIONER

***Message from the Office of the Commissioner***  
***Special Message Regarding Commissioner Thomas A. Kirk Jr., PH.D***

I join the entire behavioral health recovery community in mourning the death of former Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Commissioner, Thomas A. Kirk, Jr., Ph.D. Dr. Kirk passed away on April 9, 2020. I wanted to use this message to recognize the many contributions he made to the state and national behavioral healthcare system over his distinguished career and to pass on my sincerest condolences to his family, friends and the countless people he touched over the course of his life.

Dr. Kirk's career began as a tenured faculty member at the Virginia Commonwealth University where he taught undergraduate and graduate courses. His career thereafter included increasingly responsible leadership roles in the design, delivery, and management of healthcare services for persons with psychiatric and/or substance use disorders in public/private sectors. He led a psychological consulting firm focusing on criminal justice/forensic services, had a private practice and has served as a psychologist, manager, clinical director, and then administrator of public systems of behavioral healthcare. His last private sector role was from 1990 – 1995 as President of Liberation Programs, a substance use healthcare agency in Stamford, Connecticut.

Dr. Kirk provided leadership at DMHAS for almost 15 years, first as Deputy Commissioner and later as Commissioner. From October 1995 until his appointment as Commissioner, he served as Deputy Commissioner of DMHAS. He joined DMHAS at a critical time when mental health and substance use services were being integrated into one agency and he was instrumental in fostering the development of the newly created state agency. His tenure as Commissioner began in May 2000 and it concluded when he retired in September 30, 2009.

I, like so many others, was personally touched by Commissioner Kirk when I began my own career at DMHAS. His commitment to recovery, cultural competence, and quality consumer driven services have been guiding principles in my own career. His strong belief was that recovery from substance use and mental illness is possible. He believed that there were multiple pathways to recovery including faith, self-help, and treatment. He strongly believed that the best teachers of what works are the individuals and families we are honored to serve. His vision for a recovery-oriented system of care was perhaps his greatest legacy to Connecticut and the nation.

Dr. Kirk's accomplishments during his tenure at DMHAS were remarkable. He guided the integration of mental health and substance use services in Connecticut, tirelessly promoted inter-agency collaboration, was a staunch advocate of the consumer movement in Connecticut, and led the Blue Ribbon Commission on Mental Health and an earlier Blue Ribbon Task Force on Substance Abuse. Dr. Kirk was a true pioneer in the field of behavioral health, championing integration, recovery and co-occurring disorders long before these became mainstream ideas. He was driven by a desire to enhance every system of care for which he had responsibility. In a 2006 review of the mental health systems in

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all 50 states, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) rated Connecticut and Ohio as the best in the nation.

Throughout his life he was a father, husband, teacher leader, and friend. For many of us, he was simply "Tom". I know I speak for the entire behavioral health community in Connecticut when I say thank you Tom. Thank you for improving the lives of so many people in Connecticut.