



# NAMI Connecticut

Connecticut's Voice on Mental Illness

Testimony to the Public Health Committee, February 21, 2007,  
From Sheila B. Amdur

I am testifying today for Keep the Promise Coalition, a coalition of more than 30 organizations of people in recovery from mental illnesses, families, and advocates in support of **BILL 5631: AN ACT CONCERNING STATE SPENDING ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

"Keep the Promise" is about the state keeping its promise to the people who once were warehoused in state psychiatric hospitals--when the hospitals closed, housing and community services would be available to help people live fulfilling lives in the community. That promise has not kept. Every study that has been conducted in the last 7 years has concluded that a lack of community services has contributed to a continuing and disturbing increase of people with serious mental illnesses

- Incarcerated, many due to minor crimes related to their illnesses;
- Languishing in nursing homes, often on so-called locked behavioral health units that look like the back wards of the old state hospitals;
- In emergency rooms, homeless shelters, and even backed up in our remaining state hospitals because there is no available safe, affordable housing or services.

Bill 5631 codifies the solutions that have been spelled out over and over again in all of these studies:

- Maximizing Medicaid to generate federal funds for services currently paid for by 100% state funds.
- Dedicating this new revenue to strengthen the mental health system and expand access to housing.
- Redirecting funds from inappropriate institutionalization to housing and community services.
- Establishing grants and rates that cover the reasonable costs of services.

This bill would require that DMHAS grant funds remain whole, not be taken as the match for new Medicaid funds for what previously had been grant-funded programs.

1. Retain DMHAS grant funds

- for the transition costs into Medicaid fee-for service,
- for non-medical services (social support)
- for non-Medicaid eligible clients.

2. Mandate a rate-setting structure that covers the cost of providing services and updates rates on a regular basis.

3. Target funds to expand housing options & services for those with complex needs.

4. Monitor the impact of these measures on inappropriate institutional and emergency room care, and reporting outcomes.

If we do not take these steps, we will actually REDUCE the size of the community system, which is not the outcome that any of us seek. We urge you to pass Bill 5631; let's finally as a state "Keep the Promise" to people with serious mental illnesses and their families.



## KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

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