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**2/21/07 Public Hearing
Public Health Committee
Testimony in Support of *Bill Number 5631, AN ACT CONCERNING STATE
SPENDING ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES***

Good Afternoon, thank you to all the members of the Public Health Committee for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of my organization. Keystone House is a non profit mental health agency located in Norwalk. I am here today representing the over 250 people who receive services from our agency, for the 50 staff who work there, the 16 Board members who give generously of their time and talent and the hundreds of citizens who donate their own money to fund our many programs.

I am here in support of Bill Number 5631 because Governor Rell's budget does not contain the needed funds for Keystone, or other service providers, for continued successful implementation of the Medicaid Rehab Option (MRO) for mental health group homes or community support services. We can not successfully provide the needed services under the MRO without the support of two key budget priorities:

- 1) Enact Community Investment and Fair Rate Methodologies for the Medicaid Rehabilitation Option**
- 2) Enact Changes in the Medicaid Spend Down Threshold**

Keystone House has been participating in the MRO program since January 2005. We have been able to meet the new standards for MRO for group homes, our staff and clients have responded positively to the new programming. But this has brought higher costs to our agency and due to the ineligibility of clients on Medicaid spend-down we are now losing money. It is extremely important that you support Bill 5631 and keep it moving forward.

Bill # 5631 will;

- Establish rates for community mental health services covered under the MRO through a cost-based methodology which provides for annual cost of living increases.

- Provides DMHAS with the same appropriations for community mental health services for the fiscal year ending 6/30/08, and each subsequent year, as received for the fiscal year ending 6/30/07, including annual COLA adjustments.
- The transition to MRO can happen successfully if you allow DMHAS to retain appropriations to protect the capacity of their providers to serve their communities while transitioning to MRO services.
- Bill 5631 will allow DMHAS funded providers to serve those who are on Medicaid spend-down or are not Medicaid eligible. This is critical to any provider's survival.
- Provides non-Medicaid services that are essential to sustaining healthy, community based living arrangements for the DMHAS population.
- Utilizes remaining funds to support initiatives and community supports that prevent hospitalization and institutionalization of the DMHAS population. Mental health services have progressed and we all know that community based treatment works best.

Please support this bill and the mental health treatment providers and consumers of our state. Thousands of adults with psychiatric disabilities and their families are depending on you. Changes to the mental health system of care must be made with the proper resources and planning. Without properly planning and funding the transition to MRO many people will suffer, our clients, their families and this will ultimately cost taxpayers more to fix the newly created problems. Your efforts on this matter are appreciated and needed. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Thank you.