



**Testimony  
Public Hearing  
Public Health Committee  
Melissa Marshall, Executive Director  
Advocacy Unlimited  
February 21, 2007**

Good evening Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Melissa Marshall. I am the Executive Director of Advocacy Unlimited (AU). As you may be aware, AU is a non-profit, consumer controlled organization that empowers people with psychiatric disabilities through education in self, systems and legislative advocacy. Advocacy Unlimited has been presenting classes to residents of Dutcher Hall, Whiting's medium security facility for the past 36 months. Once a month AU participates in a forum at Whiting where Dutcher residents share recovery strategies with Whiting residents. I am testifying today in opposition to **House Bill 1068 AAC PATIENT RIGHTS AT WHITING FORENSIC DIVISION** and in favor of **House Bill 5631 AAC STATE SPENDING ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**.

I'll speak to **House Bill 1068** first. The proposed legislation potentially limits Whiting resident's property, privacy and other rights. The bill mandates that the policy be drafted by the Director of Whiting and approved by the DMHAS Medical Director and the Medical Director of DMHAS. There is no provision for review by advocates, individuals in recovery from psychiatric disabilities and family members.

Whiting Forensic Division is not a prison. It is a hospital. To the Commissioner's great credit DMHAS has made a commitment to a recovery centered philosophy. One of the core values of the recovery centered philosophy is that everyone can recover. The 'everyone' whose recovery is possible includes not only people with minor psychiatric disabilities or people with major mental illness who have not been accused of committing a crime. It includes people found not guilty by reason of insanity, or people working towards competency restoration or people fulfilling a prison term. It includes the people who live at Whiting.

This is not to say that there should be no security at Whiting. There is already. Any policy that is implemented should be done so in a way that respects patient's rights to the highest degree possible ideally on a case by case basis and with input from the advocacy community and people in recovery and their family members. DMHAS has committed to a recovery based philosophy. Let's find a way to balance security interests with people's rights. Let us affirm that recovery is for everyone, not just people with mental illness that are popular.

The next bill that I'm testifying on is **House Bill 5631 AAC STATE SPENDING ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**. In brief this bill ensures that implementation of community mental health services under that state Medicaid plan is operate in a way that enhances and promotes that state's mental health system.