

**Testimony of Janine Sullivan-Wiley
Before the Human Services Committee
February 26, 2008**

**Re: SB 413 – An Act Establishing a Community Provider Rescue Fund Account
and Community-Based Services Commission**

**Re: H.B. # 5617 An Act Delaying the Implementation of and Making Revisions to
the Charter Oak Health Plan**

Good morning Sen. Harris and Rep. Villano, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Janine Sullivan-Wiley and I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Regional Mental Health Board. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about SB #413 regarding the Community Provider Rescue Account and HB #5617, concerning revisions to the Charter Oak Health Plan.

The Regional Mental Health Boards were created by the legislature and put in statute over thirty years ago. Membership consists of all stakeholders – persons in recovery, family members, providers, and interested citizens. Our mandate includes responsibility for evaluating programs receiving state funds, needs assessment, and planning to address the identified needs.

Regarding the Community Provider Rescue Fund, **I am at a loss to understand why this is even a question**, except that every year it goes on the situation becomes more dire and the solutions more expensive. But I ask you: if the Governor or Legislators saw a bridge with completely eroded supports – you would know that you had to fix it. If you saw that the wheels on your car were wobbling and ready to fall off, you would fix it. **That is where we are with the private providers in this state.** As their bills for oil and electricity and health care have gone up, the only place they can cut is in the staff part of the budget, and I can tell you that **we have absolutely lost capacity in our communities** – and you have certainly heard enough that community capacity needs to increase to address gridlock. I wonder: do you not actually believe that they are in crisis? They are. This is NOT a over-stated plea.

I have heard that the solution is for mergers. That is not true. The problems are just as grave in the large organizations as the small. I have heard that they should be “more efficient” and “creative.” Well, now the efficiency is that they can’t even hire people for what they can offer. The creativity is that positions can go months without being filled, essentially meaning that their capacity is reduced. Clients – people trying to recover – are suffering.

We need our private providers –
and we need them to be successful.

They are an absolutely critical part of the services for people with mental illness and substance use disorders. PLEASE enable them to succeed.



As for the Charter Oak Plan, I am deeply concerned that it does not provide full parity for treatment of all illnesses – in other words it somehow thinks it will work to have lower coverage for treatment of mental illness and substance use disorders.

As young people enter the job market, they often get jobs that do not provide health insurance. They have to buy it themselves. Both of my children have been in that position.

I have also seen how mental illness often strikes that age group, and it is *critically important that it be covered to the same extent as other illnesses*. Otherwise we are simply shifting the cost. Having the right coverage is not simply fair, it makes good sense. It means that whether a person develops a cardiac problem or a mental health problem, they can get the treatment that they need - the right treatment, in the right amount. People should not be told that – “whoops! Sorry, but the illness that you got has an early cut off. You’re out.”

Don't leave them out.

With proper treatment, people with mental illness and substance use disorders can and do recover. They are our co-workers, our children, our neighbors. “They” are “us.”

Please hold up the implementation so that you can amend this health care plan to provide the coverage – fair and complete coverage for all illnesses.



Do not shortchange the people who will be getting this plan and thinking it is a real plan for health care coverage.

Both of the things I am asking for today are about fairness and about putting in place what people need to be successful in their communities.

Thank you for your help.

We need it.