



Testimony

Dr. Karen A. Kangas, Interim Executive Director
Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.

Bill No.H.B. 5449

February 28, 2008

I am here this evening to support the proposed DMHAS budget. I am currently the Interim Executive Director of Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. Advocacy Unlimited Inc., incorporated in 1998, is a 501(c) (3) non profit organization founded, governed, and operated by consumers and persons in recovery. Its Board of Directors is comprised of 10 members, 100% of whom are persons with or in recovery from psychiatric disabilities.

AU's mission is to improve the quality of life for all persons with, or in recovery from, psychiatric and/or co-occurring disabilities through education in self and system advocacy skills. It is an organization dedicated to promoting self-determination for these individuals and to the improvement of mental health services statewide.

As a person who has been diagnosed with a major mental illness for forty years, I feel strongly that the approach needed to help us get needed treatment is through kindness, support, and understanding. Commitment is extremely negative, punitive, and abusive in most cases. As it is now legal for psychiatrists to commit if it is absolutely necessary, there is absolutely no reason that anyone else be given that authority (even for one hour). We do not commit people for other debilitating diseases and mental illness should not be treated differently. If we as people with psychiatric disabilities were treated with respect kindness and choice we would seek treatment which would mean that in most cases force would not be required. Talking with us with hope and love would help us cooperate with treatment---of course, force is a much easier approach but the results are not the same. What is the goal? My own recovery has been sustained only through outstanding treatment (including medication) hospitalization when necessary (police have been extremely kind and patient when they accompanied the ambulance) support from family, friends and colleagues. In addition, my support system has included people in recovery who constantly supported me. Commitment is negative and stigmatizing. Do not pass this bill!!!!