



A bridge for law enforcement
and community collaboration



Testimony before the Public Health Committee

February 29, 2008

Re: HB 5449

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today. I am Louise Pyers, President of the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE) and Criminal Justice Project Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of CT. Both organizations support HB 5449, An Act Concerning Issuance of Emergency Certificates by Licensed Clinical Social Workers and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses.

CABLE is a non-profit research and education collaborative made up of police, mental health professionals, persons with mental illness and their family members who are dedicated to the safety and well being of persons in law enforcement and the communities they serve. CABLE is the state's sole source police trainer for Law Enforcement Crisis Intervention Teams. As such, we understand the value of a trained clinician who can provide assistance to the police, when needed, by assessing and writing an Emergency Certificate for a person who may be a danger to self or others, or gravely disabled. The police can and do write Emergency Certificates. However, some often feel at a disadvantage when trying to assess what may be happening without special training in psychiatric diseases. Writing an Emergency Certificate will take away a person's rights and cause that person to be committed to a hospital without his or her consent. Most police officers do not take that enormous responsibility lightly.

When CIT officers can utilize the services of a trained clinician, it also initiates a process that enables the clinician to follow up with the client to ensure that the client is receiving services. Once a person is released from the Emergency Room, the clinician can provide the continuity of care that is so often lacking when a person is discharged. Without support, many people who are discharged are left to their own devices to seek outpatient care. This can be a recipe for failure and it can turn into a public safety issue requiring the police to respond again.

Most clinicians who meet the criteria of the state statute 17a-503 and who work in DMHAS jail diversion programs are ALREADY able to write emergency certificates. CABLE and NAMI-

CT support this bill because it will provide uniformity by specifically naming CIT clinicians and those who work as members of Advanced Supervision and Intervention Support Teams (ASIST). Naming these specific programs within this state statute ensures that these programs will continue to have this option as one of many jail diversion tools to help clients with serious mental illness who are in crisis. The ability for a jail diversion clinician to write an emergency certificate can help a probationer receive short term crisis stabilization in a hospital setting and avoid a possible long-term stay within a correctional facility. NAMI-CT would not support legislation that expands this power to write emergency committals to entities that do not already have it.

We urge you to support this bill. It solidifies the authority of mental health clinicians who are working in all of our jail diversion programs to have as many options as possible to assist persons with mental illness when they are in extreme psychiatric crisis. It will help persons with mental illness stay out of jail. It will preserve public safety and, most importantly, it will save lives.

Respectfully submitted by:



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and
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