



**Good Morning, Chairman and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Domenique Thornton, I work for the Mental Health Association of CT, Inc., (MHAC), and a 100-year old private non-profit dedicated to service, education and advocacy for people with mental health disabilities. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to S.B. 840 An Act Concerning the Elimination of the Office of the Office of the Healthcare Advocate implementing the Governor's Budget recommendations. The mission of the Mental Health Association (MHAC) is to provide quality services and compassionate relationships that engage, instruct and inspire persons with serious and persistent mental illness. Through education and advocacy, we empower people to new understandings and actions so that they feel hope, acquire ability, and find meaning in their lives. In all our interactions with customers, stakeholders and each other we provide the same level of service and quality we would expect from healthcare providers treating our own family-members or ourselves. People with serious and persistent mental illness can have a life in the community and avoid the expensive and restrictive hospital or institutional care formerly provided by the state. But, it is not possible to have a successful life in the community without mental health parity that ensures that persons with serious mental illness receive the same level of services for mental health as for physical health in their healthcare. The Office of the Healthcare Advocate took the cause of mental health parity to the federal level this year to ensure that when Congress passed the national mental health parity bill it did not pre-empt Connecticut's stronger parity law. Were it not for the work of the Office of Healthcare Advocate, Connecticut would not be a leader in this area. Make Connecticut proud of the compassionate care it provides for people and keep the Office of Healthcare Advocate as an essential part of the mission of government.**