

Testimony before the Human Services Committee

5230

Support for HB 5230

Feb. 5, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Margarita Torres and I live at One Linden Place in Hartford. I am here to testify in support of HB 5230 AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE HOUSING AND SERVICES FOR TRANSITIONING YOUNG ADULTS.

The lack of adequate services for young adults with mental illness is an issue of grave concern for me. As the mother and legal conservator to my son, I know how life threatening and disabling mental illness can be for a young person. Diagnosed at 17 with drug-induced psychosis, my son is now at 24 years of age living at CT Valley Hospital in a lock-down ward, receiving intense treatment. He has suffered a downward spiral of hospitalizations, group homes, incarceration and a society that totally rejects him as he does not fit the mold of "normalcy"

He is currently dual diagnosed with schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. This means that he has trouble following through on simple tasks, taking care of himself, taking medication as prescribed, socializing, reading—again, all the things a young person needs to be able to do, in order to become a functioning member of a community.

His first in-patient hospitalization resulted in his running away as soon as he turned 18. He came home, only to run away from us, and get into trouble. Scared of the voices he was hearing, and the ensuing psychosis, he would call me from wherever he was staying—"come get me mom, I'm afraid".

This would lead to yet another quick hospital stay, and another quick release..with no support system for him whatsoever. He couldn't drive, as who would let a teenager have the keys to the car if they were taking medications that make them sleepy. He couldn't get out of bed in order to attend out-patient treatment—all geared toward adults.

This is not the life I envisioned for him, and certainly not one that he wanted for himself. An honor student in the Glastonbury school system, an avid snow boarder and a lover of music—well on his way to a college life, and a career of his choice.

I shudder to think what children with my son's diagnosis suffer through, not having consistent support. Where will they live, who will help them? These are our children in need of a system that will keep them out of jail. Taxpayer dollars, and more importantly, LIVES are being wasted as young adults with mental illness reach the age of 18 with no place to live.

Even with my support, and for the first few years, the support of his father, he still has no place to live that will provide the supervision he requires, and the training he needs.

My son will get better. Medication soothes the voices and he will one day be able to read again, concentrate, and perhaps get a job. But, he won't be able to do this without your help.

Bill 5230 asks you to provide age-appropriate housing and services to youth and young adults that allow them to transition between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services without the currently mandated changes in their housing or services.

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This will allow many young adults continuity in their home lives and in current support systems. It may actually mean the difference between a real life, and one of survival in the streets, shelters, hospital emergency rooms or jail. Please don't give up on young adults whose parents are not there to catch them when they fall.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions you may have.