



National Alliance on Mental Illness

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
March 19, 2009
Support for SB 1125**

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I am the Public Policy Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, CT (NAMI-CT). NAMI-CT is the largest member organization in the state of people with psychiatric disabilities and their families. I am here today to testify on behalf on NAMI-CT in support of SB 1125, An Act Concerning Comprehensive Revision of the Human Rights and Opportunities Statutes.

Section 4 Subsection (a) (1) of SB 1125 includes people with mental disabilities in the groups of individuals who are protected from discrimination within state contracting procedures. The contractor is prohibited from discriminating against any person or group of persons based on race, color, religious creed, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, present or past history of mental disability, mental retardation, learning disability or physical disability, unless it is shown by the contractor that the disability prevents performance of the work involved.

People with psychiatric disabilities are already a protected class in our state, and numerous policies at the state and federal level recognize the importance of ant-discrimination protection for this highly stigmatized population. People with psychiatric disabilities have serious and persistent neurobiological brain disorders and face multiple obstacles throughout the employment process due to factors related to their illnesses, such as stigma, financial distress, ongoing health concerns, and trouble obtaining disability accommodations in the workplace.

According to SAMHSA's there is a **90 percent unemployment rate among adults with serious mental illness—the worst level of employment of any group of people with disabilities**. Strikingly, surveys show that many of them want to work and report that they *could* work with modest assistance (Drake et al., 1999). The Center further notes that our Nation's largest "program" for people with mental illness is disability payments – the cost of which is unacceptable in both human and economic terms.¹ This is especially disturbing in light of the above fact that most **people with serious mental illnesses can and want to work**.

This bill simply extends current law to state contracting and levels the playing field for individuals with psychiatric disabilities allowing them better access to state positions.

We hope you will pass this important legislation.

¹ <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/NMH02-0144/unemployment.asp>