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**TESTIMONY
TO THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MARCH 6, 2009**

Senator Coleman, Representative Sharkey and members of the Planning and Development Committee, I am Dr. Stephen Becker, President and CEO of HARC, Inc., an organization that serves people with intellectual and related disabilities. Founded in 1951, HARC is a grassroots family organization that provides life span services including: birth-to-three/early intervention, family support, respite, supported employment, adult day program, recreation, residential, behavioral health, elderly and advocacy services.

I am here today to urge you to oppose **Raised Bill 6596, An Act Concerning Notification Requirements for Halfway Houses** as a matter of general principle, but especially as it pertains to community residences licensed by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). There has been a system in place for regulating the development of community residences since 1979 that is comprehensive and effective. Testimony presented to this committee by DDS outlines applicable licensing and oversight rules and regulations that serve to ensure quality, protect the residents and the community at-large.

I object to this bill for three reasons:

1. The legislation implies that people with disabilities do not have the right to live in the community. While neighbors do not have an obligation to befriend them, they do not have the right to exclude them. This legislation suggests that an intelligence requirement be met for people to live in the community by the imposition of a zoning requirement. It is hard to imagine in this day and age that zoning requirements would be enacted that would allow for discrimination of people who

are different or needy, when living in a residence that is appropriately scaled to other homes in the community.

There are laws to protect the rights of people with disabilities such as the Federal Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Connecticut General Statute 8-3e that requires that residences which house six or fewer people with intellectual disability and necessary staff persons, and which are licensed by DDS, be treated the same as any single family residence. Further, the Connecticut Constitution provides for equal protection and non discrimination for persons with physical and mental disabilities.

2. This legislation is unnecessary. Generally, town officials are aware of the development of community residences. Developers are in touch with the building department of the town and the Fire Marshal. Even though DDS approved group homes for six or fewer residents do not require zoning approval, they frequently require extensive remodeling that is reviewed by the zoning department. The Fire Marshal is involved because his approval is required in order to obtain a DDS license.

3. This bill suggests that residents of these homes are a threat to the community. To maintain an internet data base of group homes is akin to maintaining an internet date base of convicted sex offenders. The implication is that the community must be protected from the residents. This could not be further from the truth. HARC has had community residences for over 20 years and during that time none of the residents has been a threat to any member of the community.

Furthermore, not only does the database suggest that the residents are dangerous it also creates a potential threat to the residents and staff by detailing the number of residents and staff in the home.

I urge you to vote against this exclusionary and hurtful legislation. Thank you.

