

Thomas A. Kirk, Jr., Ph.D.
P. O. Box 513
Cheshire, Connecticut 06410

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Martin M. Looney, State Senator
Claire L. Janowski, State Representative
Co-Chairs, Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear Senator Looney and Representative Janowski,

It is a distinct pleasure and truly an honor to write in support of the nomination of Patricia Rehmer as Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). She is an extraordinarily skilled and innovative professional with whom I have had the opportunity to work since her appointment by Dr. Solnit in December 1999 to be Chief Executive Officer of the Capitol Region Mental Health Center (CRMHC) and thereafter during my tenure as Commissioner from May 2000 until September 30, 2009.

It was clear from her first year of leadership at CRMHC that this executive, who came with extensive experience as a psychiatric nurse and increasingly responsible senior clinical and administrative leadership positions during 17 years at the Hartford Hospital/Institute of Living, was a timely and perfect fit for the challenges of a public system of care and the vision of recovery that I set for DMHAS in 2000. During her three years at CRMHC she reorganized this major urban center such that access to initial and continuing care was sharply increased, more clients were served than ever, and she established the first DMHAS acute care contract with a community hospital to ease emergency department gridlock and to link clients with good discharge plans and entitlements to support their care. Finally, she changed the relationships with and among the DMHAS-funded private not profit agencies from competition to collaboration by facilitating Hartford Area Executive Group meetings that promoted a coherent system of care.

For all that she accomplished at CRMHC -- in spite of the layoffs/early retirements in 2002/03 as well as the additional duty of serving as my Senior Staff on the Community Mental Health Strategy Board established by the Legislature July 2001, Ms. Rehmer was asked to leave CRMHC to join my Executive Group April 2003. Her charge was threefold: stabilize the staffing structure and operations of our state operated system, identify practices and management structures to improve the quality of care yet more efficiently, and assess any resultant impact on the DMHAS-funded nonprofit system. As was the case at CRMHC, her work as a member of the Executive Group was stellar and led to her selection mid 2004 as a Deputy Commissioner.

As noted at the outset of this letter, the recruitment of Ms. Rehmer in December 1999 was a timely and perfect fit of a healthcare executive into a public system of care for persons with psychiatric/substance use disorders. *It is even more the case now.* Her selection by Governor Rell and hopefully your confirmation of that nomination, offer the opportunity for the same timely and perfect fit due to the quality of service and extraordinary fiscal challenges faced by Connecticut. The nature of psychiatric/substance use disorders for people in care does not abate during tough fiscal times nor does the presentation of individuals/families newly impacted by these healthcare conditions. Substance abuse prevention for youngsters, now more effective than in past years and our health promotion efforts to curb the tragic premature death rate, an average of 15 years – for persons with psychiatric/substance use disorders *cannot* be delayed or stopped.

Ms. Rehmer is a healthcare professional who is resolute in her values that any of the 90,000 plus persons/families already in or entering the DMHAS healthcare system must always be treated with respect, provided with care that does not simply eliminate symptoms but also with services that promote recovery and the highest overall quality of life the person can attain in spite of their illness. That includes a decent place to live, something worthwhile to do, and inclusion in their community. Chances are that some of your constituents have spoken with her as she intervened in an effective, comforting way to stabilize a situation at times of crisis. I knew when asking her to follow up on such calls to my office that would be the outcome. That is who she is as a person.

Her leadership of the Mental Health Transformation (MHT) grant (\$13.7 million over 5 years) since 2005 is dramatically changing the field of mental health in Connecticut in areas ranging from decreased stigma and early identification to increased individual/family empowerment and promoting an enhanced workforce to meet Connecticut's needs. This is a highly cross-state agency and Judicial Branch initiative that will pay dividends for years to come. Just as she did with private providers associated with CRMHC, she has been a consensus builder and a leader across systems. Just last week in a conversation with persons at the national level, I was told what I already knew: Connecticut's Transformation work was the best in the nation. Her work is recognized now on a national level. A similar finding was the case in 2006 and again in 2009 when the National Alliance on Mental Illness did their "Grading the States" survey.

Ms. Rehmer knows how to manage budgets but will never do it at the expense or risk of care to individuals. Her ability to assess the workings of large healthcare systems such as DMHAS is so sound that she understands how service quality and financing mechanisms can be meshed to yield appropriate care and at the best cost. Clearly, we need that skill level now more than ever.

She is a superb nominee for Commissioner now and will be for years to come.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Kirk, Jr., Ph.D.