

# CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.

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TESTIMONY OF JAN VANTASSEL, ESQ.  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
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## SUPPORT FOR SB 251 AAC THE LONG TERM CARE ADVISORY COUNCIL

My name is Jan VanTassel, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit organization that provides free legal services to adults with psychiatric disabilities on matters related to their treatment and civil rights. I was previously employed by the State of Connecticut developing alternatives to institutional treatment, including the nursing home preadmission screening program and home and community based services waivers. I also serve as the President of the ADA Coalition of Connecticut. Last, but by no means least, I am the caregiver for my 93 year old mother who resides with my husband and myself instead of being placed in a nursing home.

All of these experiences have contributed to my perspective toward Connecticut's efforts to provide safe and affordable living arrangements and services for persons who might otherwise be institutionalized. I appreciate the work that the state has done to achieve its goal, and legal mandate under the ADA, of providing services in the least restrictive environment.

I am here today to testify in support of SB 251, AAC the Long Term Care Advisory Council, specifically the proposal to add a person with expertise in mental health issues to the Council.

Connecticut's long term care advisory council has evolved from an entity that focused solely on the needs of elders to one which addresses "the development and maintenance of a consumer-driven system of long term care services and support across the lifespan and across all disabilities..." . The state's long term care plan also functions as its *Olmstead* plan, a plan to demonstrate the state's good faith efforts to comply with a federal mandate to discharge people who are unnecessarily institutionalized to the community at a reasonable pace. Despite the fact that the plaintiffs in that case were residents of a psychiatric facility, most of the activities to comply with the decision have been focused on nursing homes or other Medicaid funded facilities. Discharging persons from psychiatric facilities is rarely mentioned.

In fact, I submitted extensive comments which were incorporated into the state's most recent report to assure that persons with psychiatric disabilities residing in state hospitals were not excluded from the report. This included citing several positive initiatives that the state has

implemented to promote the community integration, self determination and employment of persons with psychiatric disabilities.

This experience made it clear to me that it would be very informative to have a person with expertise on mental health issues participate on the advisory council. The current membership simply does not have the scope of knowledge required to adequately assure that the needs of this population are adequately incorporated into the council's discussions. I am certain that the proposed change would improve the state's planning and contribute toward its goal of addressing the needs of all disabilities in all settings.

I urge you to take favorable action on SB 251.