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**Appropriations Committee
Department and Addiction Services” Budget Hearing
February 18, 2010**

**Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.
Dr. Karen A. Kangas
Executive Director**

Good Evening Members of the Appropriations Committee:

It is with extreme concern and sadness that I address you this evening. Mental Illness is a devastating disease; it is well documented that our life expectancy is twenty five years less than the average person. If it is combined with an addiction disorder (co-occurring) it can and often is fatal. I speak to you with personal experience and much anger. I have lived with bipolar disorder for over thirty years—the ups and downs of my life and that of my family are too painful to describe. The general public thinks that a pill or two will “cure it”. They are so wrong and ignorant of mental illness.

The positive story that I can relate is that with adequate supports, housing, person-centered treatment, a job (kindness, love, acceptance)—GUESS WHAT??? Many of us can work, pay taxes, but all of us can have a life worth living. Of course, your concern today is the budget. Those of us in recovery from mental illness and co-occurring disorders can help and will be glad to contribute. It costs too much to put us away in institutions and nursing homes.

Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. just trained 60 people in recovery to work in the behavioral health field. Our training program completed with a grant from the Ct. Department of Mental Health and Addictions entitled Recovery University was an exciting adventure to give people back their lives. The 60 people are certified and can be reimbursed by Medicaid. My own recovery began with a man that said, “I have what you have and I have a job, a family, and a house”. HOPE is the constant star in my recovery toolbox.

We are not the “mentally ill” we are proud people who want to regain our hopes and dreams. There is not a person in this room tonight that cannot relate.