



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION
Community Solutions, Not Institutions!
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**Testimony before the Human Services Committee
In Favor of SB 251
March 09, 2010**

Good morning/afternoon distinguished co-chairs and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg, Coordinator of the statewide Keep the Promise Coalition. The Coalition was formed in 1999 in response to the community mental health crisis following the failure to properly invest in a community mental health system after the closure of two of CT's large state psychiatric hospitals. The Coalition is dedicated to investment in a comprehensive, community mental health system in CT.

Keep the Promise Coalition is here today to testify in favor of SB 251, an Act Concerning The Long-Term Care Advisory Council. The replacement of Section 1, Subsection 17b-338 would ensure that the Long-Term Care Advisory Council would have representation by "a person who has expertise in mental health issues..."

Keep the Promise Coalition submitted recommendations for changes to the 2010 Long-Term Care Plan, along with twenty-five signers representing groups of children and adults with disabilities and older adults. Long-term care is used by older adults and people with disabilities who require that level of care. A Council member with expertise in mental health is specifically needed due to the high number of people with mental illness residing in institutions, including nursing facilities and psychiatric hospitals.

The Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services indicated that there were over 3,000 people with mental illnesses residing in nursing facilities in CT in 2006. Although the state has begun to invest in programs such as Money

Follows the Person (MFP), and utilizing the Mental Health Waiver (WISE), this will only address the needs of a small portion of this population. People with mental illness also get stuck in costly hospital settings due to an inability to access adequate services and/or safe, affordable housing. Following the recent proceedings in New York State, this Coalition is also concerned with any group home settings in the "community" where there is a lack of opportunity for people who wish to access independent or other types of integrated, community housing options.

I personally have a family member who has lived in hospital and nursing facility settings. From that experience, as well as hearing from Coalition members across the state, I can tell you that most people with mental illness, like most people in general, do not need an institutional level of care and would prefer to live in the community with any needed supports. It is also important to note the cost-savings of living in the community compared to \$218.00 per day in a nursing facility or \$1,200 per day for inpatient psychiatric care. Forcing a person with mental illness to remain in an institutional facility against their wishes when they are able to live in the community does not make human nor fiscal sense. The longer a person remains in a facility, the harder it can become to successfully re-enter the community.

The current landscape of long-term care in CT is far broader than older adults in nursing facilities. A Council member with mental health expertise would ensure that these and other mental health-related issues are not left out when considering the future of long-term care in CT. Keep the Promise Coalition urges this committee to pass SB 251.

Thank you for your time.