

Representative Walker and Senator Doyle and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee; I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of these important legislative initiatives.

Good morning, my name is Elizabeth Dempster; I am a registered nurse for Key Human Services and work in group homes in Bolton and Hebron. While I am new to these group homes, I am not a stranger to the range of mental health services and their clients in Connecticut. I have been a nurse in mental health inpatient settings, forensics and in the community. I have seen a range of ages and health status.

Imagine that you are a child who started life with a multitude of disadvantages, and behaviorally were not safe to be managed at home. You have been moved out of the state you are in because there is no place available to take you in. Your only living relatives are 4 hours away.

Two years later, at the age of 15, you are over 300 pounds, diabetic, with hypothyroidism and blood pressure problems and have to use a breathing machine regularly at night so that you don't stop breathing in your sleep. Over the last two years, you haven't been taught anything about your medical conditions or how to handle them. When you feel bad, sad or depressed you tell the staff where you live that you feel like your blood sugar is low so you are given a snickers bar. It feels great, until you have to step on the scale to be weighed and told you have gained yet again. You feel angry after being weighed, so the littlest things set you off. Someone looks at you or you hear a whisper and think people are saying things behind your back. Because your self-identity is tied to what others think and tell you to think,

you bite yourself and break your breathing machine. No one bothers to fix it, so you don't sleep so that doesn't help. It is a downward spiral.

This young lady moved three weeks ago to the group home where I work, and has begun to learn about things that will affect the rest of her life forever. She is learning to be responsible for her own health, relate to others and to use coping skills other than food. Her health and decisions are supported by the therapeutic care plan. Her success will be determined by the support she receives today.

To close I would like to restate our support for H.B. No. 5430. Also, Key Human Services is in support of S.B. No. 316, An Act establishing a commission on nonprofit Health and Human Services. I thank you for your time and consideration of these critically important issues. I would also encourage you to contact me to see our Therapeutic Group Homes in Bolton and Hebron.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information:

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