



# THE CONNECTICUT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Miner and the members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am Dr. Barbara Bunk, psychologist and president of the Connecticut Psychological Association (CPA). On behalf of CPA and its approximately 500 members, I would like to express our strong opposition to the Governor's proposed merger of the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) into the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP). Our primary concern is the loss of independence to the OHA should this merger occur.

The mission of OHA includes the education of and advocacy for Connecticut's healthcare consumers. The office accomplishes this mission by watching over existing state programs and insurers offering healthcare services; proposing appropriate legislation; evaluating the impact of federal laws and regulations on Connecticut's healthcare consumers; and engaging with managed care companies to resolve conflict and address systemic issues. *OHA requires independence from the executive branch of government in order to fulfill these tasks.*

Placing OHA under DCP is tantamount to a loss of independence that will severely compromise OHA's ability to carry out its mission and will thereby do great damage to the healthcare consumers of Connecticut. OHA's sole obligation is to healthcare consumers. It was established as an independent agency in 2001 in order to allow it to best fulfill this obligation. As one of many examples of its success, OHA has advocated- and is in the process of advocating for- protections for state benefits under the federal mental health parity act. It must continue to function independently of the executive branch of government if it is to continue to achieve its goals.

Whereas CPA understands the current financial position of the state and the need to cut spending and increase government efficiency, including through the consolidation or merger of state agencies, we do not believe that the merger of the OHA under the DCP will do either. Because OHA is funded through the Insurance Fund, its merger under DCP will not save the state general fund dollars. It is our understanding, also, that OHA already garners maximum efficiencies by being housed in the Insurance Department, benefits which include significant cost savings to the state. OHA reports a cost savings of \$5.7 million in this past year alone, due in

part to administrative efficiency resulting from its location within the Insurance Department. Finally, OHA's independent status has contributed to its receipt of federal grant money. The federal government recognizes that such independence is necessary to the consumer advocacy mission achieved by agencies such as Connecticut's OHA.

In conclusion, CPA wishes to emphasize that OHA is working very well under its current arrangement. As an independent agency, OHA has offered significant assistance to consumers of behavioral health services for more than a decade now. We urge the members of the committee to bear in mind both (1) the importance of OHA's independence to its mission and (2) its current financial and administrative efficiency as you consider the Governor's proposed merger of this agency under an executive branch department and the obstacles to its success that will arise as a result.

Thank you for your time this evening, and for taking our feedback into consideration as you consider this bill.