

Statement in opposition to

House Bill 6389 – An Act Transferring the Responsibilities of Special Revenue, Consumer Counsel, Healthcare Advocate, and Board of Accountancy to the Department of Consumer Protection

General Law Committee

March 8, 2011

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the 800 members of the Connecticut Psychiatric Society in opposition to House Bill 6389.

House Bill 6389 would merge the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) with the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP). We understand the need to make tough decisions during this bleak economic time. However the merger of OHA with DCP is not one that we can support.

If saving money is the Governor's goal, the merger of OHA will do nothing to further that goal. As legislators are well aware, the state does not fund OHA's \$1 million budget; instead it is funded by a levy on the insurance companies. This fee will not simply go into the general fund if OHA is eliminated but will be credited back to the insurance companies. In fact, the efficiency of OHA speaks for itself. OHA saves consumers an average of \$4.00 for every dollar it spends on consumer education. Given OHA's self funded nature and tangible benefit to Connecticut citizens, we question why this merger is necessary. In addition, merging OHA would weaken its voice for healthcare consumers as it virtually disappears within DCP. The current office is a national model for independence. Given that many mental health services are paid for by public payers (and with Medicaid, ultimately the state) there is an inherent conflict of interest in giving oversight to an executive agency.

Our interest in OHA is also largely based on its advocacy for people with mental illnesses. The insurance process is often a difficult and bureaucratic nightmare especially for those who do not know the "system". Most people never appeal a denial because they either don't know about the process or can't figure it out. Those who do appeal often complete countless forms and paperwork, jump through hoops and then are left bewildered and disgruntled because instead of focusing on getting well, they are worried about securing coverage for their care. OHA has helped to take the "nightmare" out of the process for thousands of people over the years. The existence of this office speaks volumes about the legislature's recognition of the problems

delivery of these services to citizens.

We are hard pressed to think of a valid reason why an agency which serves the people at no cost to the state would need to be merged and weakened.

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