



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

241 Main Street, 5th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106

Phone: 860-882-0236; 1-800-215-3021, Fax: 860-882-0240

E-Mail: keepthepromise@namict.org, Website: www.ctkeepthepromise.org

**Testimony before the Human Services Committee
March 1, 2011**

Support for SB 959

Good afternoon, Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Keep the Promise Coalition which is dedicated to seeing that a comprehensive, community mental health system is created and sustained in Connecticut. The Coalition strongly supports SB 959 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE TRANSITION OF YOUTH FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES.

This bill would promote the successful transition of youth and young adults from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Having both departments working together will help to prevent an abrupt change in housing and service providers at age 18 and instead provide a planned, thoughtful transition period for youth and young adults with the most intensive mental health needs.

Currently there is a lack of appropriate services and transition planning for youth and young adults transitioning into the adult mental health system. Both Departments are required to create and execute transition plans for each young adult transitioning from DCF to DMHAS. However, plans are not always in place or, when they are, are not always executed. This bill would hold the departments accountable for timely transition and collaborative programming by seeking data necessary to gain full understanding of this population's needs as well as any barriers to appropriate transitioning and treatment.

This bill would also help to promote that youth do not "fall between the cracks" by requiring both Departments to agree that all elements of a youth's transition plan that directly relate to a safe and therapeutic transition have been successfully completed before DCF can terminate their services. This is particularly important for youth who would require intensive interventions in order to acquire the skills necessary for success as an adult and plan for acquisition of these needed skills. These include independent living skills such as paying bills, housekeeping, cooking, the ability to act as an educated consumer, career development and other skills necessary for successful adult living in our society. Preparing these youth for successful transition to young adulthood greatly increases their likelihood of success in the adult system.

Young adults need to make critical life decisions about the course of their life as they begin considering all of the choices, rights, and responsibilities before them. When a young adult is also challenged with a serious mental illness, it is even more critical that this time period be as smooth as possible. Currently many youth with serious mental health needs in the DCF system have to leave both their home and their service providers at age 18. For youth that have a history of trauma and trust issues, this abrupt change can be another traumatic event. In addition, they might enter an adult system that does not necessarily provide needed specialized young adult services or they may choose not to engage in the service system at all. The result is that many of these young adults fall through the cracks of society even ending up incarcerated or homeless. For those youth who were institutionalized in residential settings for long periods of time, the transition can be exponentially more challenging.

The Coalition urges you to pass SB 959. Helping young adults smoothly transition to the adult system will save the state money by preventing youth with mental health needs from ending up in the costly justice system and utilizing costly emergency care by preventing unnecessary interruption to young adults' lives.

The Coalition would also like to testify in support of HB 6360, a bill which would require written notice of denial to Medicaid recipients whenever a denial at the pharmacy occurs advising them of their appeal rights in the event of an error of the means to obtain prior authorization and informing them if alternative drugs are available which do not require prior authorization. The bill also requires notice to the prescriber. Multiple Coalition members have expressed frustration and confusion when they are denied prescriptions at the pharmacy. We feel this bill would help clarify the process for many of our members. Please refer to NAMI-CT's testimony for further information.

Thank you for your time today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Cheri Bragg
Keep the Promise Coalition Coordinator