

Testimony before the Planning and Development Committee
February 7, 2011
Opposition to HB 5142 and 5259

Good afternoon Senator Cassano and Representative Gentile. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I am the Public Policy Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI-CT. We are the largest member organization in the state of people living with mental illness and their families.

NAMI-CT opposes HB 5142 and HB 5259, both entitled An Act Requiring a Public Hearing on the Location of Group Homes. These bills would compound significant barriers that already exist to the siting of critical programs for people with psychiatric illnesses.

Housing, jobs and community services are essential resources that are often not available for people with psychiatric illnesses who are ready to live in the community. Therefore, the state spends money on very expensive hospital beds for these individuals while waiting for communities to accept them. Study after study, in this state and nationally, reflects the stark and disturbing deficits in housing and services, resulting in homelessness, unnecessary nursing home admissions, and at worst, imprisonment. ***All of which translate into higher costs to the state.***

Furthermore, stigma and discrimination cause many individuals and groups to have gross misperceptions about people who have psychiatric disabilities -- a factor contributing to the need for special protections under state and federal law. The health care information of those with psychiatric disabilities is protected and cannot be shared with the public. Furthermore, the State Constitution guarantees people with disabilities protection from discrimination as a protected class.

If these bills were passed, we believe that the state and municipalities could face legal action by violating the federal Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act by targeting persons who have disabilities and discriminating against them on that basis.

Persons with psychiatric disabilities already have few options for finding safe, affordable housing within the community, and siting issues already represent a huge barrier to the development of necessary community services and residential options for people with serious mental illnesses. This causes people to remain in state hospital beds at \$1,200 per day.

With a place to live and the right treatment and medications, people with serious mental illnesses are able to engage in recovery, lead happy and fulfilling lives, and participate in Connecticut's economy.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.