



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Patricia A. Rehmer, MSN
Commissioner

Testimony of Patricia Rehmer, Commissioner
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Before the Planning and Development Committee
February 7, 2011

Good afternoon, Sen. Cassano, Rep. Gentile, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. I am Patricia Rehmer, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and I am here today to speak in opposition to **H.B. 5142 and H.B. 5259**. Both bills would require that public hearings be held before a group home is located in a city or town.

Background: DMHAS and Mental Health Care

DMHAS is a health care agency. We provide behavioral health services to over 100,000 individuals statewide, including inpatient hospital services, residential treatment, and community supports to thousands of individuals to assist them in their recovery from psychiatric disabilities and substance use disorders. We face many challenges in providing the best possible care to the people we serve. We want to expend our state dollars wisely to improve people's lives, as well as the communities in which they reside.

People with substance use disorders and psychiatric disabilities come to state hospitals for their care when they are not able to be managed in a general hospital setting or when they need intermediate- to long-term care. Most often, our clients are poor, and have chronic diseases which require, like any other chronic disease, ongoing care. We work with them, their families and advocates toward the best possible treatment outcome and to determine how best to assist them to achieve recovery. The challenges faced by the populations we serve are exacerbated when housing, jobs and community services are not available for those who are ready to live in the community.

While we understand the need for transparent and open government, we believe these bills would violate federal laws and impose increased costs on a state budget with a massive deficit.

Legal Concerns

The individuals served by DMHAS have protections under state and federal law. Their health care information is protected -- any attempt on our part to give it to the public is prohibited. We believe that the bills before you today would not withstand the laws that protect that information and that **the State and municipalities will face costly legal challenges under the federal Fair Housing Act.**

Further, the municipal notification requirements of the bills **violate federal regulations concerning substance abuse confidentiality** which could result in the loss of federal dollars. These laws **could also be challenged under the Americans with Disabilities Act**, in that they target persons with disabilities and discriminate against them on that basis.

Higher State Costs

While DMHAS does not have many group homes (30 statewide), we already have a very difficult time siting community services, including residential placements for the people we serve. We believe that H.B.5142 and H.B.5259 will further impede our efforts in this regard, **resulting in the continued need for higher priced beds in a hospital setting.**

In 2011, Connecticut simply cannot afford these higher costs.

People remain in state hospital beds at \$1,200 per day if we cannot access sufficient appropriate housing for them in the community. We fund approximately 30 group homes and 108 residential programs, but demand for such placements is great. The money the state spends to keep the individuals we serve in very expensive hospital beds while we wait for communities to accept them is not a fiscally sound use of taxpayer resources.

Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding these bills. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.