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**Testimony of Margaret A. Hann, Executive Director, The Bridge Family Center and a member of the  
Connecticut Association of Nonprofits,  
Related to Proposed Bill No. 5142  
AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE LOCATION OF GROUP HOMES.**

Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee thank you for your time and attention to the issues before you today. My name is Margaret Hann and I am the Executive Director of The Bridge Family Center. The Bridge serves over 7,000 children and families in our many programs each year.

Today, I am voicing my opposition to **Proposed Bill No. 5142 AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE LOCATION OF GROUP HOMES.**

Proposed Bill No. 5142 discriminates against the young people we serve by requiring a public hearing thereby legitimizing fears not calming them. Our young people deserve to live in nice homes in good neighborhoods. Forcing a public hearing will delay the progress that has been made in de-institutionalizing care for abused children and could set us back decades. This "Not in My Backyard" mentality must not be given credence.

The Bridge operates five Short Term Assessment and Respite (STAR) programs, a Therapeutic Group Home (TGH) and a Supportive Work Education Training Program (SWETP). These programs provide 47 beds for young people in need of care in a community based setting.

Since 2006, the Bridge has opened four STAR homes and one Therapeutic Group throughout the state. These programs provide care for boys and girls ages 11 to 21. Most of them have been abused, neglected and abandoned by their biological families. They are not criminals, sexual predators, or drug dealers. Most of these homes were opened under considerable opposition from neighbors and local authorities. Despite this opposition we stayed the course to open our programs while educating our neighbors and keeping the lines of communication open. We hosted open houses, and community forums. Each home has an advisory council consisting of police and school personnel, neighbors, clergy and social service professionals. These councils meet quarterly and provide a forum for communication and cooperation.

Our homes blend in with the neighborhood. We are good neighbors. We have invested thousands of dollars into renovating our homes, sometimes making them the most attractive home in the neighborhood. As a result, the young people living in our homes are part of a community. Our neighbors, in some cases even our most resistant ones have become our friends. This is not to say that we do not have periodic issues but because we have formed positive relationships, they are quickly resolved as is the case with good neighbor relationships. In closing, I ask that Proposed Bill No. 5142 be laid to rest so that Connecticut's most vulnerable young people can be afforded the simple privilege of living in a community. I invite you to contact me with any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.