



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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**Testimony of Christine Perra Rapillo
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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
FEBRUARY 8, 2011**

RAISED BILL NO. 198
AN ACT CONCERNING RIVERVIEW HOSPITAL

The Office of the Chief Public Defender opposes passage of **Raised Bill No. 198, An Act Concerning Riverview Hospital**. This proposal seeks to close Riverview Hospital for Children and relocate the children who are patients there to private facilities. The closure of Riverview Hospital would be disastrous to the children of Connecticut who suffer from serious mental illness. The children at Riverview are those in the most acute need of hospitalization. A child cannot be admitted to Riverview without a court order or a physician's certificate indicating a need for hospitalization. Without access to Riverview, most of those children would spend a significant amount of time waiting in local emergency rooms or simply not receiving needed care. Children with unmet mental health needs will eventually appear in other state systems, such as juvenile justice or corrections. This will not save the state money. It will simply delay or shift the cost of care to a different agency, one that will be less equipped to handle a severe psychiatric issue than Riverview Hospital.

There currently are not enough private hospital beds to accommodate children in need of inpatient psychiatric care. Even children with health insurance are unable to find hospital care and spend time in local emergency rooms instead of receiving urgently needed care. Local hospitals routinely make efforts to get children committed to Riverview, as they are unable to provide the services the child needs. Those children who make it in to the child welfare or juvenile justice system have little ability to access the private services available. Even now, police find it necessary to arrest children who are clearly acting out of a psychiatric issue in order to insure that the child get timely access to services. Closing Riverview without an enormous commitment of revenue to increase private services would simply increase the numbers of

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children in detention and in child welfare facilities. At some point it is the state of Connecticut's responsibility to provide a "last resort" option for citizens in need. This is most true for our children and the children who end up at Riverview are those most in need of our care and attention. Absent a clear and concise plan for where the patients at Riverview would go and a plan on how to pay for it, Riverview must remain open to care for the children who need to be there. We have already seen the impact that closing adult mental health facilities had on the adult corrections system. Connecticut cannot allow the juvenile or adult justice system to become the back of treatment provider for children who are severely mentally ill. The Office of the Chief Public Defender urges that this bill be rejected by the committee.