

TO: Members of the Appropriations Committee, CT General Assembly

RE: House Bill 5014

My name is Howard Drescher and I reside at 85 Beech Mountain Road, Mansfield Center, CT 06250 with my wife Carolyn. We are the parents of a 43-year old adult daughter who has suffered from a severe mental illness since the age of 17. Over the years we have seen all the highs and lows of living with mental illness in our family. We continue to advocate strongly for our daughter and for the many other Connecticut individuals and families who struggle daily with the challenges that mental illness presents.

I can tell you from my personal knowledge and experience that people who suffer from mental illness, especially severe and persistent illnesses that lead to lifelong disability and, in many cases, early death, are among the most vulnerable members of our society. They are people for whom the "social safety net" is usually the only thing between a Spartan but acceptable life and one of degrading physical and psychological poverty. Most people who have been spared exposure to severe mental illness don't understand what it really means.

I respectfully urge the committee to refrain from funding cuts that would further reduce the vital assistance provided to our fellow citizens with mental illnesses. Specifically, I ask you to oppose the proposed reductions to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services budget for Young Adult Services, as well as proposed eligibility changes to the Medicaid Low Income Adult program. I also urge retention of funding for inpatient legal services for those individuals needing assistance during the critical transition from hospital confinement.

I am well aware that as legislators you must make very difficult choices in this time of fiscal austerity. I simply ask that you consider the circumstances of those among us who are usually the most needy and least able to care for – and advocate for – themselves. Connecticut has a strong record of recognizing the needs of the mentally ill. I urge you to uphold and sustain that commitment.

Respectfully,

Howard S. Drescher
Member, National Alliance on Mental Illness
Family representative, CT Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council