

TESTIMONY OF WILLIAM ACOSTA – HOUSING COMMITTEE

SUPPORTING

S.B. No 94

ACC THE EQUAL TREATMENT OF RENTERS WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES

March 8, 2012

My name is William Acosta and I come before you today to address Raised Bill No. 94, “An Act Concerning the Equal Treatment of Renters with Mental Disabilities.” I come today to advocate *for* the addition of the protective language in Section 1, Subsection “a” Letter (C) that would enhance the existing language to read “person with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities and who has a record of such impairment or is regarded as having such an impairment” and in Section 2, Subsection (i) to include “or mental impairment.”

I am a case worker at Bridge House, Inc. in Bridgeport. Bridge House is a nonprofit psychosocial day program that is certified by the International Center for Clubhouse Development and funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Bridge House has an impeccable twenty-five year history of providing an encouraging environment of support and daily programming to persons with psychiatric disabilities.

Thanks in large part to your individual work on behalf of programs like Bridge House, great strides have been made in recent years to enhance the quality of how persons with such disabilities are able to lead better and—in many cases—satisfying lives.

I also come as an interested party. I am the parent *and* child of people with psychiatric disabilities. My mother suffers from a psychotic disorder (as well as cerebral palsy), and my son has been diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder. The excruciating emotional pain of witnessing them in their distress

when they are not doing well cuts to the core of my own ability to cope with what many of us take for granted in our everyday lives.

The proposed addition to the language of the existing law, in my view, gives credibility and equality to those who might otherwise not be able to fend for themselves because of a mental impairment. For as long as all of us in this room can remember, people living with mental illness have been stigmatized—seen as less than equal; seen as people who have to be kept subdued and seen as people who must be kept out of the way. When it comes to housing, now, this proposed language addition will clearly help all of us along the path to abolish that stigma. It will go a long way in preventing evictions based solely on a person's mental impairment, because it will be a part of the law—in writing, if you will—so there can be no mistake. On behalf of so many, I simply would like to say *thank you* for your vision and your compassion to ensure that this language is added, and that it is unmistakable.