

## CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT

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**TESTIMONY OF KARYL LEE HALL, ESQ.  
of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project  
in Support of Raised Bill No. 293,  
An Act Concerning Permanency and Transition Plans.  
March 6, 2012**

On behalf of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc. ("CLRP"), I am writing to express our support for Raised Bill No. 293. Our organization is a statewide non-profit agency that provides free legal services to low income adults with psychiatric disabilities. We represent many young adult clients who are 18 to 25 years of age. Among them is a significant subset of especially fragile individuals who are moving from the jurisdiction of the Department of Children and Families ("DCF") to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services ("DMHAS"). CLRP supports Raised Bill No. 293 because it will mandate, among other things, that permanency plans for youths who are sixteen years of age or older will include crucial information concerning DCF's efforts to teach the youth independent living skills, the steps taken by DCF to develop a personalized transition plan for the youth, and benefits information that will assure benefits screening and timely determination of eligibility in advance of reaching eighteen years of age.

1. DESPITE A MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE AGENCIES, YOUNG ADULTS CONTINUE TO TRANSITION FROM DCF TO DMHAS WITHOUT APPROPRIATE LIVING SKILLS OR ADEQUATE TRANSITION PLANS.

A memorandum of agreement, signed by DCF and DMHAS IN 2006, directs DCF to focus on increasing the independent living skills of transitioning youth and to provide extensive information to DMHAS about these transitioning clients. Good transition planning allows DCF to support and prepare the client for change and for DMHAS to work with the client to accommodate his or her needs ahead of time, not after a chaotic and precipitous transition. Unfortunately, the Memorandum of Agreement has not been adequately implemented by DCF with the result that youths are ill prepared for the rigors of community life. The lack of planning impairs DMHAS's efforts to engage these young people and it often causes a delay in their psychiatric recovery. The statutory mandate supplied by Raised Bill No. 293 will require DCF to do what is essential for a good transition from DCF services in a way that was not accomplished by the Memorandum of Agreement.

2. DCF FREQUENTLY TRANSITIONS YOUTHS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES WITHOUT DETERMINING THEIR ELIGIBILITY FOR BENEFITS

In our experience, many young persons leave DCF jurisdiction without any preliminary benefits screening and without any effort to prepare a benefits application. This can delay a client's access to housing, health care and even certain treatment programs. Without appropriate benefits, young adults are at risk for all the temptations that society offers to those whose judgment is immature, who lack job skills and who have little in the way of family support. This is not just a missed opportunity; it is an invitation to tragedy. Benefits planning, eligibility and access should be seamless. Raised Bill No. 293 will require DCF to acknowledge its responsibility for benefits screening, planning and preparation in the body of a permanency plan document that is available to courts, clients, families, advocates and guardians. Such transparency will encourage the agency to provide transitioning youth with the services that are universally agreed to be essential.

For these reasons, we urge you to support Raised Bill No. 293.