



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

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Testimony of Patricia A. Rehmer, MSN, Commissioner
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services
Before the Public Safety Committee
March 6, 2012

Good morning, Sen. Hartley, Rep. Dargan and distinguished members of the Public Safety Committee. I am Patricia Rehmer, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and I am here today to speak in support of SB 337 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SILVER ALERT. I want to thank the committee for raising this proposal for the department.

The bill before you will address an issue that has come up when a family member, conservator or myself, as Commissioner, requests the issuance of a Silver Alert on an individual who has walked away from one of our five inpatient treatment facilities (CT Valley Hospital, CT Mental Health Center, Capitol Region Mental Health Center, and Greater Bridgeport CT Mental Health Center).

When an individual who is receiving inpatient services from a DMHAS facility is deemed missing, it has been the practice of our DMHAS Police to issue an emergency alert notification to local, state, regional and/or nationwide law enforcement agencies, through information they enter into the COLLECT (CT Online Law Enforcement Communication Teleprocessing) System. This practice of sending a teletype has served us well over the years and has met the confidentiality requirements for our patients.

Connecticut's Silver Alert System can potentially speed up the process of locating and safely returning a missing inpatient by extending the emergency notification to the media and general public. We had some concerns regarding patient confidentiality, since the information provided to the media and general public would include a picture of the individual and healthcare information. When we looked at the statute as presently written however, we realized that it gave the family members and conservators authority to contact the state police directly, and that DMHAS would not be put in a position of having to breach a patient's confidentiality.

Taking these issues into account, we changed our policies and began to inform family members and conservators of individuals in our inpatient settings who walked away from treatment, that in addition to DMHAS sending out a teletype, they had the option of requesting the issuance of a Silver Alert through the Division of State Police. We soon learned that the Silver Alert request must come from the local police agency that has jurisdiction over the missing person investigation, which in our cases, would be our DMHAS Police. They would need to complete and send a Division of State Police form requesting a Silver Alert to their Communications Center.

Our DMHAS Police are CT P.O.S.T. (Police Officer Standards and Training) Council certified and are located at all five inpatient facilities. If the proposal before you becomes law, these officers would have the ability, when it is determined that the missing person fits the mandated criteria for the Silver Alert, to utilize this system on behalf of a family member, conservator, or myself as Commissioner. In doing so, the present impediments faced by all parties would be removed and we would limit the amount of information that can be released, thereby expand the options in our efforts to locate and safely return missing inpatient individuals who may be at risk.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this proposal.