# Testimony to the Joint Committee on Aging
# February 26, 2013
## H.B. 6460 AN ACT LIMITING THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING ADULTS

Good Morning Senator Harp, Representative Serra, and respective members of the Joint Committee on Aging. My name is Michaela Fissel and I am a current resident of Windsor, Connecticut. I would like to first **thank you for considering H.B. 6460 AN ACT LIMITING THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING ADULTS** during today's public hearing. It is an honor to have the opportunity to be part of the discussion.

I am here today as a member of the statewide, peer-run, initiative, Join – Rise – Be. The members of our network are not only young people, but we are also in recovery from mental health and/or substance related disorders. The reason we have established our initiative is because we envision the opportunity of recovery be made available to every young person in the State of Connecticut.

We have concluded that one way to strengthen the opportunity of recovery within our communities is by helping to remove barriers that lead to negative social outcomes experienced by young people with a behavioral health diagnosis. Over the past few months, we have been creating an inventory of the Silver Alerts issued within Connecticut and that are available through the Internet. We began to do this because we were very uncomfortable by the information being disclosed by state and local police departments, family members, and mental health providers when registering a Silver Alert.

I know, personally, that it took me a great deal of courage to begin to share my experiences with the diagnosis of bipolar disorder, and I needed to be well into the end stages of my recovery to be able to have the ability to stand up when I inevitably face ridicule in response to my disclosure. I am very thankful that the only information about my mental health diagnosis that is available through the Internet is shared by me and framed through the vision of recovery.

I would ask you to please consider for a moment, the negative outcomes that will be experienced by our peer, Leslie Leckie, of Ledyard.[1] The Silver Alert issued for Leslie included that she was both manic-depressive and paranoid schizophrenic. Now, her mental health diagnosis will be available to anyone that includes her name in an Internet search. In fact, the first five Google hits are related to the Silver Alert issued for her. It is very unfortunate that this young lady will now be subjected to unnecessary scrutiny from community members, including possible employers, and face discrimination due to the inclusion of confidential information in a public record. It's as if Leslie will face an automatic barrier now in all social contexts because there will always be the chance that her diagnosis will precede her, and shape the lens through which she is perceived.

We have come to know that the way to ensure that recovery is made available to our peers is by responding to the need for our feedback and perspective as recipients of mental health services and as young people in recovery. It has been a pleasure sharing our experiences with you today, and **I look forward to your support of H.B. 6460 AN ACT LIMITING THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT MISSING ADULTS.** Thank you again for assisting us as we work towards strengthening the culture of recovery for our peers.

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[1] http://www.wfsb.com/story/15737886/silver-alert-issued-for-missing-ledyard-woman

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