



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

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Patricia A. Rehmer, MSN
Commissioner

Testimony of Patricia Rehmer, Commissioner
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 25, 2013

Good Morning Senator Musto, Representative Jutilla and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am Commissioner Patricia Rehmer of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and I am here today to speak in favor of Section 1 of **HB 6670** An Act Concerning Supervised Absentee Voting, Applications for Absentee Ballots and Duties and Responsibilities Assigned to Moderators. I want to thank the Committee for including this language in the bill before you.

This language if passed by the Committee would apply the same rules for voting by absentee ballot for any person who needs inpatient psychiatric care and is served in a general hospital to individuals who are inpatient at the three (3) DMHAS hospitals. Current state law defines our hospitals as "institutions". Individuals who want to vote and who are in a state institution can only do so supervised by someone from the Registrar of Voters office in the town in which the institution is located. Individuals who want to vote and are inpatient on a psychiatric unit of a general hospital do not have the same restrictions and can vote by absentee ballot without supervision. As a result, current law creates an inequity for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, who need a longer length of stay, are medically indigent or who are in a DMHAS hospital solely because they are waiting for community services to become available.

DMHAS is a hospital and regulated as such under the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and The Joint Commission. We are required to meet all standards set by these bodies, we are inspected by these bodies on a regular basis and can be fined or taken to court should we be out of compliance on any of their rules. We are required to provide the same inpatient services as any other psychiatric unit in a general hospital and believe that our patients should be treated the same way when it comes to voting as well.

Changing the statute would also create less confusion in our hospitals as to who can vote by absentee without supervision. The practice of mailing absentee ballot applications to home towns has always been offered to short term patients in our hospitals. A small number of patients who continued to use an off campus address as their registered voting address also availed themselves of this voting option. We do not see any difference in these populations as a whole and would argue that as a result, they should be treated equally when voting.

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

Spoken
3/25/13