

Testimony of Deborah R. Strong
Before the Judiciary Committee

April 15, 2013

In Support of Raised HB 6684

**AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTAKE, REFERRAL AND
INTERVENTION SYSTEM RELATING TO THE PROVISION AND DELIVERY
OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

Thank you Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me to testify in support on proposed House Bill 6684. I have worked with the National, State and Local level of The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) for seven years. I am on the board of directors for NAMI-Farmington Valley. I received a grant from the Regional Consumer Advisory Council (RCAC), with the support of NAMI Connecticut, to offer a conference for people on their journey of recovery. I am part of the planning committee and we are trying to involve other non-profit organizations in the state in this endeavor. Our conference is named "Recovery, Hope and Wellness," and will touch on the many different ways people have designed their own recovery from mental illness.

There are very caring people trying to decide on the best way to help people with mental health and addiction problems. We need to remember that only the person living with mental health and/or addiction issues, can design their own recovery. Recovery is different for everyone. There are many choices a person makes while on their journey to sustained recovery. We need to respect and provide for these choices.

I live with Bipolar Disorder and Psychosis and am in recovery. We hear a lot of talk and speculation that if individuals living with these conditions would just stay on their medications, all would be well. This is just not the case. In my recovery, I feel that medication only brought me part way in my own journey towards wellness. Work with self-help strategies and programs have been a big part. Peer support, I think, is another big piece. If I were to draw a pie graph, peer support would be the largest slice.

I found I was not alone with my illness. I did not have to be ashamed or reclusive. The peer support I continue to receive has been invaluable. In an attempt to give back, many of us support, educate, and advocate for ourselves and others. Working with NAMI Connecticut has led me, as a family member, to work with families as well. Family understanding and support is very important both for families and the person living with mental illness and addiction. People have better rates of recovery with support and services aimed at helping families support their

loved one with mental illness and addiction. This is also a large piece of the pie. Funding with DHMAS should include families.

DMHAS is seriously in need for more funds for services. The creation of more programs is needed to ALL those who need services in Connecticut. There are many qualified, caring professionals within DMHAS who express genuine frustration because of insufficient funding or cuts in funding. There are more people than they have funds for who need help. DMHAS also funds non-profit organizations that are solely designed to help people living with mental illness and addiction and their families. These organizations help people on their journey with support, education, and advocacy. Peer support is so important to those that are recovering from mental health and addiction issues. Peer Support Specialists have been very valuable in other states and should be better funded in Connecticut. We need to adequately fund DMHAS so that they can better fund the programs I have previously described.

Connecticut already has great programs and services serving our communities. We can do more. Please support DMHAS, non-profit organizations, and Peer Support Specialists to better serve the needs of people living with mental illness and addiction. We will have more people in recovery who are productive members in our communities. This should be the ultimate goal.

Thank you for allowing me to address you in support of this very important bill.