

Sheryl Sprague, Prevention Manager, Rushford Center
Testimony in **Support of SB 654**
An Act Creating Mental Health First Aid for Parents
Children's Committee Public Hearing February 26, 2013

Chairwoman Bartolomeo, Chairwoman Urban, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 654, An Act Creating Mental Health First Aid Programs for Parents.

I am Sheryl Sprague, Prevention Manager at Rushford Center, a Hartford HealthCare affiliate with locations in Meriden, Middletown, Glastonbury, Portland and Durham. Rushford provides mental health and substance use recovery services to adolescents and adults in Connecticut and beyond.

Mental Health First Aid is a 12-hour interactive training course designed to give members of the public the key skills to help someone who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. As a public education program, Mental Health First Aid saves lives, reduces stigma, improves mental health literacy, and empowers individuals.

Like CPR training helps a non-medical professional assist an individual following a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps an individual without a clinical background to assist a child, family member, neighbor or friend experiencing a mental health crisis until professional clinical help can be obtained.

Mental Health First Aid is an empirically-backed public education and prevention tool. It improves the public's knowledge of mental health problems *and* connects people with care for their mental health problems.

In their training, Mental Health First Aid participants learn about the prevalence of mental illnesses in the United States; the potential warning signs of the most common mental health disorders; a 5 step action plan to assist an individual in crisis; and resources available to help someone who may be experiencing with a mental health problem.

Mental health is a critical component of an individual's overall health. As with any health issue, those experiencing a mental health crisis are best served when intervention is provided early. The Mental Health First Aid curriculum is an important and effective tool in providing the necessary education to parents, teachers and other caregivers in recognizing signs and symptoms, in providing temporary aid and in obtaining appropriate professional help not only for children, but for every person we meet.

Because of this – and an effort to provide recognition and assistance to children exhibiting mental health issues - I encourage you to broaden the language in this bill to include Mental Health First Aid training for teachers and other care givers, as well as parents.

Mental Health First Aid saves lives and will CONTINUE to save lives. It will also serve to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and substance abuse disorders thereby encouraging those suffering from the disorders to seek necessary treatment.

For these reasons, I ask your support of SB 654, and will take any questions you may have at this time.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today in support of SB 654.