



**Testimony of Victoria Veltri
State Healthcare Advocate
Before the Children Committee
In support of SB 972
March 5, 2013**

Good afternoon, Representative Urban, Senator Bartolomeo, Senator Linares, Representative Whits, and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate (“OHA”). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health insurance plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 972. Recent events have unfortunately thrown into sharp relief the importance of an adequate behavioral health system in Connecticut and we know that additional legislation will be considered by the legislature addressing these issues, which we anticipate supporting. OHA has been and remains actively dedicated to improving consumer access to appropriate behavioral health services. In addition, OHA is statutorily empowered to collaborate with consumers, providers and advocates to ensure: “(1) Best practices in mental health treatment and recovery; (2) compliance with the provisions of sections 38a-476a, 38a-476b, 38a-488a and 38a-489; and (3) the relative costs and benefits of providing effective mental health care coverage to employees and their families”. C.G.S. 38a-1041(e)

In furtherance of this authority, OHA has been engaged in this discussion for years and is cognizant of the fact that this discussion will continue for some time to come. In October 2012 we held a public forum focusing on barriers to access and delivery of mental health and substance use treatment and services. Our findings indicated a need for an overall vision of an integrated behavioral health system, with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention as well as a comprehensive and innovative approach to delivery of these necessary services. The full report can be accessed at http://www.ct.gov/oha/lib/oha/documents/publications/report_of_findings_and_recs_on_oha_hearing_1-2-13.pdf.

We have also applied for a grant to conduct a study of the effectiveness of the Behavioral Health Partnership as a model for behavioral health care management and delivery. By enhancing OHA's years of direct advocacy in this area with a comprehensive analysis of delivery models and best practice, in collaboration with other key stakeholders, OHA believes that Connecticut can develop an innovative, clinically appropriate and cost effective behavioral health system for the citizens of Connecticut.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHA's testimony today. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at victoria.veltri@ct.gov.