

TESTIMONY OF LAURA PALUMBO, MANSFIELD, CT REGARDING SB 374

Respectfully submitted to the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

March 7, 2013

I am writing to oppose SB374, An Act Requiring Behavioral Health Assessments for Children. While I concur that lawmakers should take action to protect our children from acts of violence and destruction and to promote access to services for individuals needing mental health services, this bill will accomplish neither. It is an intrusive and broadly stated bill that takes the solution to mental health problems in the wrong direction. In the case of the Sandy Hook tragedy, and in fact other shooting rampages across the country, the acts of violence have been committed by individuals with known mental health issues. Identification is NOT the issue. Our resources should be directed toward access to effective treatment, ongoing support, research into better therapies, and attention to escalation of violent attitudes or thoughts in already diagnosed individuals.

The children across Connecticut should not bear the burden of being subjected to unnecessary and intrusive screening. Parents, who know their child best, already seek diagnosis and treatment when they have concerns about their child's mental health. Moreover, there are existing laws (IDEA and state special education statutes) that are already in place to identify children who require intervention or support.

Lawmakers should concentrate on improving access to mental health services by simplifying and improving routes to treatment. They should work to prevent mental health problems by creating positive, safe, bully-free learning environments for children. They should direct funding not to wasteful across-the-board screenings, but to treatment programs, residential and transitional programs, and basic research in effective diagnosis and intervention.

This is a hasty bill that infringes upon basic rights of parents and children. Mental Health evaluation should be conducted only WHEN THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT IT IS NEEDED, and it should be done in such a way that the known subjectivity and error inherent in current mental health evaluation processes can be addressed. It is also fiscally impractical; Any screening that could be practically funded and implemented would be so brief, error-prone, and superficial as to render the results trivial. Yet at the same time, the process of being subjected to this assessment in itself has unknown, possibly harmful consequences. Please consider improving and consolidating systems of access and delivery into an effective and Constitutional system that will enhance and protect children's lives while making our schools and other public places safe.

Please vote against this bill and others like it.