



Office of the
Healthcare
Advocate
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

**Testimony of Victoria Veltri
State Healthcare Advocate
Before the Public Health Committee
In support of SB 170
February 20, 2013**

Good afternoon, Representative Johnson, Senator Gerratana, Senator Welch, Representative Srinivasan, and members of the Public Health 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 applaud the committee's foresight and initiative in proposing SB 170, an act to provide inmates with health care upon release from prison. The challenges facing individuals upon release from prison are significant. Finding appropriate housing, employment and reintegrating into society alone are considerable burdens, but for many of these individuals, this challenge is complicated by mental illness. Studies consistently demonstrate that a significant number of inmates, more than half, suffer from mental illness. (<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/mhppji.pdf>) Releasing these individuals into this complex situation without an appropriate medical and social safety net greatly increases the risk for recidivism. Although the severity of each individual's mental illness will vary, the stressors associated with reintegrating into society can easily trigger the underlying disease or substance use, which is rampant in prisons.

By ensuring that inmates have access to continuing access to treatment and medication upon release from prison, we can give them a far greater opportunity to successfully rejoin society and realize their full potential. The pilot program SB 170 proposes is an excellent first step in extending appropriate care to these at risk individuals and, if successful, could ultimately realize reduced expenditures through reduced recidivism, better mental health outcomes and increased participation in society.

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.