



**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Children's Committee
March 6, 2014**

IN SUPPORT OF

**HB 5304 AN ACT PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS FOR YOUTH UNDER THE CARE OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Good afternoon, Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Children's Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups across the state, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals living with mental health challenges and parents and family members of individuals living with such challenges. I am writing to you today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to express our strong support of *HB 5304 An Act Preventing Homelessness for Youth under the Care of the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families*.

First, we would like to thank the Children's Committee for taking up this important bill on this extremely significant issue. This proposal would take crucial steps to combat homelessness of youth who are exiting foster care by 1) prohibiting youth from being discharged from the Department of Children and Families to homeless shelters, motels or other temporary arrangements which are likely to lead to homelessness, 2) providing legal representation for youth who are subject to involuntary termination from DCF care and 3) ensuring that every child exiting foster care has a permanency plan that includes a caring adult resource. We support our colleagues who are testifying in support of this bill and who will give you more in-depth information.

We would like to stress that this is an already more vulnerable population of youth due to having spent some or many of their formative years away from their families of origin and instead in the state's foster care system with potentially several families and in different settings. Thus, the need for stability including having a stable, safe and caring home environment for these youth is even more important than it would be for any youth or young adult who is also facing the common struggles of entering adulthood and independence and who most likely have some or some strong connections to family and communities. Youth who were formerly in foster care, for example, are more likely to struggle with mental health challenges compared to their peers who were not subjected to foster care¹, making their need for stability even more pressing.

Again, thank you, for moving this essential bill forward.
Please let us know if you have any questions for us.
Genuinely, Daniela Giordano

¹ Peter J. Pecora, Ph.D., et al..The Foster Care Alumni Studies. Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Mental Health Outcomes from the Casey National Alumni Studies. November 2003. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/CaseyNationalAlumniStudy_MentalHealth.pdf

