



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
*DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES*  
*A Healthcare Service Agency*

Dannel P. Malloy  
Governor

Patricia A. Rehmer, MSN  
Commissioner

**Testimony by Patricia Rehmer, MSN, Commissioner  
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services  
Before the Public Health Committee  
February 28, 2014**

Good Morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. I am Commissioner Patricia Rehmer of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and I am here today to ask for your support for HB 5145, AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES' STATUTES. This bill is part of DMHAS' legislative package and I would like to thank the committee for raising this bill on our behalf.

The bill as written makes a number of changes to the DMHAS statutes. These changes are as follows:

- Clarifies and strengthens our ability to collect data from behavioral health providers in Connecticut;
- Allows for the sharing of information in both our mental health and substance use jail diversion programs;
- Makes a critical change to our Housing Assistance statute that was recommended by the state auditors; and
- Puts into statute the current practice that allows individuals served by DMHAS to not be limited to receiving services in their region.

Data collection is an important component of our treatment system. It is a necessary requirement for our federal Mental Health and Substance Abuse Block grants and can be a determining factor in how many dollars we receive from those grants. It allows us to examine our treatment system to identify gaps, and best practices, and gives us the ability to be very successful when we apply for discretionary dollars in order to make the case for new resources from the federal government.

Increasing our ability to share information with the courts in our substance use diversion programs and between the publicly and privately funded DMHAS programs in our mental health jail diversion program will make for better continuity of care and allow for the Courts to make decisions based

upon solid clinical information. It also puts into statute the current practice that already exists where DMHAS can assess individuals in the courts who may be charged with a felony but whom the Court believes can be diverted into the community.

The language changes in our housing assistance statutes are as a result of a report by the Auditors of Public Accounts. They were concerned that we were allowing our private providers who provide housing assistance to carry some dollars over from one year to the next in order to continue to pay rental subsidies for DMHAS clients that are waiting for a RAP certificate, Section 8 subsidies or supportive housing slots. If we are unable to make changes to this statute, our ability to keep people in their apartments while waiting for other government programs to open up will be seriously compromised.

The last change we are requesting will give individuals served in our system the ability to choose where they want to receive services. This has been a policy of the Department for a number of years and we believe that it is important to put into statute a practice that is clinically sound and encourages individuals to stay in treatment.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding these proposed changes.