

Written Testimony

in support of

HB 5534: 'AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES'

Submitted to: Public Health Committee

Submitted by: Jennifer E. Fournier, Esq. on behalf of Harc, Inc.

Dated: March 18, 2014

This testimony, in support of HB 5534: An Act Concerning the Provision of Services to Individuals With Intellectual Disabilities, is being submitted on behalf of Harc, Inc.; a Connecticut non-profit agency serving people with intellectual and related disabilities, and their families. Harc has been at the forefront of the movement to improve lives of people with intellectual disability since it was founded in 1951 by families who stood up for fundamental human rights that were denied to their children. At a time when institutionalization was the only option available, Harc's founding families rejected the notion of sending their loved ones to a place where they would exist in substandard conditions, instead of living full lives. These families wanted their children to have enriched lives as meaningful members of the community, by going to school, working to the best of their ability and living in traditional homes. The families were passionate about educating people on intellectual disability; from education comes understanding, acceptance and the development of community supports that promote equality.

HB 5534 takes an important step forward in ensuring that all of Connecticut's citizens with disabilities receive the services they deserve to live a safe, healthy and fully supported life.

On February 7, 2014, families, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities came out in record numbers to participate in Family Hearing Day. The dozens of legislators who attended the hearing listened to story after story from families who are incensed at being completed on their own in caring for their loved ones. Most notably, families spoke about the challenges of caring for their loved ones on their own, the limited services available for support and their ultimate fear that the emergency trigger for the state to assist with residential care is their death. These families deserve to have their fears addressed by the state, starting with a plan for providing services to Connecticut citizens with disabilities.

Comprehensive services for Connecticut citizens with disabilities can be properly provided by a rich network of providers across the state. Individuals with disabilities require different levels of services and yet without a plan to provide them, they face only a day-to-day existence, instead of a life. We, as a state that puts its citizens first cannot stand for this any longer. The creation of a service plan for all of Connecticut's individuals with disabilities is crucial, and must include provisions for comprehensive services for each person, according to each of their specific needs. Working with private providers on fundamental systems change is a more effective way for Connecticut to utilize its resources.

Time is of the essence for systems change. In order to rise to the challenge of providing

comprehensive, individualized services to disabled citizens of Connecticut, by utilizing the private provider network, I ask that the Committee consider a date for completing system redesign that is within the relatively near term. While we at Harc would very much like these changes to be in effect by 2016, we also understand that it may take longer. That said, a plan must be designed and implemented so that changes can be made now, and continue steadily, until all people with disabilities have access to the services required for them to live a quality life and their family members can rest assured that their loved ones will be safe and secure prior to their death.