

CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.

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**TESTIMONY OF JAN VANTASSEL, ESQ.  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
APRIL 23, 2014**

**RE: SB 1135 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FOR MAINTAINING THE BUDGET RESERVE FUND AND REDUCING THE EFFECT OF BUDGET VOLATILITY ON THE STATE BUDGET**

My name is Jan VanTassel, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP) a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with mental health conditions. I also serve as the Co-chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition, an alliance established in 1999 of advocates, persons with lived mental health experience, providers, and parents united in support of a comprehensive system of housing, supports and services for persons with mental health conditions.

I am speaking today to ask that this committee enact measures that will address Connecticut's structural deficit in a manner that assures that there is a revenue stream that meets the basic needs of our most vulnerable citizens, and promotes equity in our taxes. The state's budget, both its revenue sources and its spending decisions, is the ultimate statement of our values. The budget presented by the Governor has a disproportionate impact on elders, persons with disabilities, families with children and the agencies that serve them. They reduce access to health care and vital services, and will ultimately cost the state more money.

For example, the legal services that CLRP provides to protect the housing rights of clients, and eliminated in the budget, cost an average of \$806 per case, while the cost of emergency room (\$2152) visits or inpatient care (\$1100/day) that will be needed if housing is lost far exceeds that amount. Similarly, the clinic closures and reduced services for DMHAS who cannot be served because grants are cut clients are likely to result in more expensive state costs.

The state must compare the human and fiscal impact of these cuts to the relative value of tax expenditures, such as the \$70 million of income the state forgoes due to the tax break for amusement and recreation services, or the more than \$62 million cost of tax breaks for internet services. Increasing the progressivity of the state's income tax would impact an extremely small percentage of our residents while generating the resources to provide

**evidence-based, cost-effective services for vulnerable elders, families and persons with disabilities.**

**I realize that you are making difficult choices as you compare the state's revenue and expenditures. I urge you to look at both sides of the coin and carefully consider the long term impact that your decisions will have for those who need assistance from the state to survive. Thank you.**