

Written Testimony of:
Diana Mennone
Woodbury, CT 06798

March 17, 2015

In Opposition to (Raised) S.B. No. 1088
Public Health Committee

My name is Diana Mennone and I am here to speak in opposition to the Raised Bill 1088 to develop a plan for the closure of intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. My chosen career was as a Special Education teacher at Southbury Training School (STS) for 33+ years, retiring in 2009 and I have continued my involvement with the school and with the Department of Developmental Services. I was appointed by Governor Malloy to the STS Task Force and the STS Board of Trustees, representing the Trustees on the Council on Developmental Services. I also serve as Secretary for the Home and School Association of STS, a non-profit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of the people who live there. My heart belongs to STS and many of the people who live and work there. I am speaking on my behalf but I think I also speak for those elderly parents and the founders of STS who thought their loved ones would live out their lives in the only home they've known for decades.

On a more personal note, my brother, Gary has resided at STS since 1977 and I am his co-plenary guardian along with my sister and my elderly mother. Gary has a rare neurological disorder which has resulted in a multitude of physical, sensory and cognitive challenges. Because he cannot independently move his body in space, he has a specific re-positioning schedule which limits his time for community trips. As he and many others at STS age, they require and receive more specialized services including highly enriched medical care and even hospice. The well-trained, dedicated staff at STS work as a multi-disciplinary team to meet unique and complex levels of need. Some of the long-term direct care and supervisory staff grew up in families where previous generations provided loving care to the individuals at STS. We are all family. Gary and others enjoy life in an individualized home, not a "warehouse." It sits on a beautiful campus with opportunities for day program, recreation, music therapy, and integrated community experience. Think of it as an assisted living facility for senior citizens.

The Messier Settlement Agreement (*Richard Messier, et al. v. Southbury Training School, et al.*) does not require the closure of STS. The Court also assured us as legal guardians that we are the primary decision makers with regard to community placement. Some legal guardians have chosen to move their loved ones to community living arrangements...40 people are currently pending placement. Yet I and others feel that the behavioral and medical needs of our sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, etc. are so extreme that the community homes we've visited just don't meet the high level of long-term staffing and on-site medical care.

I applaud the I/DD Caucus legislators who have so passionately gotten involved in understanding and helping the folks of DDS. I look forward to working with Commissioner Murray in seeking other creative ways to decrease the Waiting List and increase services. It just doesn't make sense to me to displace the remaining aging individuals in ICF certified facilities to replicate costly housing in numerous community living options – all in an unreasonable amount of time. This will add further expenses to an extremely strapped DDS budget and will cause safety concerns and heartache for the individuals and families involved. Much analysis needs to be done first to evaluate and resolve all the unknown complex issues.

**PLEASE RECONSIDER BILL 1088. BE RESPECTFUL OF ALL PEOPLE RECEIVING SERVICES FROM DDS
DON'T CLOSE STS AND THE REGIONAL CENTERS**

Thank you for listening to my testimony and please visit STS if you haven't already.

Sincerely,

Diana Mennone

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