



Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of Public Health Committee,

I am Pam Fields the Executive Director of the Arc of Meriden Wallingford. I am testifying in support of Bill 1088 An Act Concerning Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. I want to express my sincere gratitude for your leadership in putting forth such a positive impactful bill. My cousin Leslie, who unfortunately passed away in 2001, lived in the Meriden Regional Center for many years. This was the only alternative my aunt was given. This was the only choice she had, however as the past Executive Director as soon as she was given the opportunity the Arc of Meriden Wallingford opened their first group home and Leslie moved in. There was a big difference in the life at that point. Her belongings stopped disappearing, her clothing remained in good condition and she was able to regularly participate in community life. Just like her 27 cousins.

I was also involved in the process of assisting the last 21 individuals out of Mansfield, they were moving into public group and we were transitioning them into their new day program. I personally witnessed the transformations of how they were in the institutions and how they were once they moved into their homes. They were visibly happier once in the group homes and they were able to experience normal everyday activities, and even smell the food while it was cooking. While we were at Mansfield I constantly heard warnings that they would die if we moved them, but they did not. Those 21 individuals moved into state run group homes in central Connecticut and have done very well living in the community.

I have also visited Southbury Training School. And although grounds are nice, the buildings are institutional. It is not community living. It is not where I personally would like to live, nor would I want any of my children or grandchildren living there. It is a model that is past its time. It was all the rage in its day and now it is a sign of seclusion and lack of freedom. I am saddened that we still have models such as these in Connecticut. I am more saddened by the fact that as we the citizens of CT are trying to come up with a solution to a very complicated problem, people are dying without every experiencing freedom. And that is what I cannot rest with. My question is "What outweighs a citizen's freedom". Is it

the desires of another group that is benefiting from their institutionalization, is it the money that it will cost to support them, is it their visibility in the community? How about their culture, their race, their ability to speak for themselves, or maybe the way they look. I cannot find a good answer in any of these and I can see from this bill neither can any of you.

Again I thank you and I offer my support and assistance if needed.