



**TESTIMONY OF  
BRISTOL HOSPITAL  
SUBMITTED TO THE  
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE  
Wednesday, March 18, 2015**

**SB 1089, An Act Concerning Mental Health Services.**

Bristol Hospital appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 1089, An Act Concerning Mental Health Services**. Bristol Hospital supports the bill, as it addresses improvements to the mental healthcare system in Connecticut. What we need is a strong policy and a modest investment in a plan to provide care to these patients in need.

Bristol Hospital plays a critical role in providing all types of medical services to Connecticut residents, including mental and behavioral health services. We serve more than 4700 inpatients and 25,000 outpatients each year, and more than 3000 adults and children in crisis that we treat for behavioral health-related conditions.

My focus today is on our Community Care Team at Bristol Hospital. Since August of 2014 we have worked diligently to bring key stakeholders to the table. As one of the five hospitals in the state with the highest rate of recidivism in the emergency department, Bristol Hospital and members of the Community Care Team began its focus on these patients. On average, patients visited Bristol Hospital's emergency department eight times during a six month period. There were 408 of these patients with some visiting as many as sixty-six times in six months. In 2014, Connecticut saw 25% of emergency room visits with a principal or secondary diagnosis of a behavioral health disorder and 38% of these were Medicaid. The Bristol Hospital Community Care Team works to provide these patients with services currently limited or lacking in the community. Transportation, housing, or long term rehabilitation services for substance abuse are a few of the barriers. Bristol and many like communities struggle with supporting these patients. Further limitations on resources and funding will have a crippling effect on all of us. Section 14 of Bill 1089 identifies the needs of Community Care Teams in an overall effort to reduce costs to the state. It is the hope of Bristol Hospital and its Community Care Team you pass this bill so we may continue our work and provide our community the care they need.

A patient experiencing a mental health crisis could spend days, or even weeks, in our Emergency Department (ED) waiting for a bed in an appropriate facility, or waiting to be transitioned to the right outpatient setting, simply because there are not enough resources available to meet the constant need. Extended stays in the ED can be stressful and exacerbate

a patient's condition rather than improve it. This problem is particularly acute for children and adolescents, for whom the need for services greatly outstrips the number of available beds and trained specialists.

In 2014, the Connecticut Hospital Association convened a Subcommittee on Mental Health comprising hospital behavioral health directors, emergency medicine physicians, chief executives, chief financial officers, and government affairs experts charged with developing recommendations to improve health outcomes, relieve the burden on EDs, and improve the adequacy of funding for key mental health safety net services. Several of these steps are set forth in Sections 14 through 22 of SB 1089.

Specifically, Sections 14 through 22 call for the development of a Medicaid shared savings model, expansion of Behavioral Health Homes, and the establishment of a grant program to provide funds to organizations that provide acute care and emergency behavioral health services. They would call for the adoption of measures to disclose and disseminate more effectively information regarding the admission criteria, admission process, and program capacity of state-funded and supported facilities and programs that offer mental health or substance abuse services. Additionally, they would call for the establishment and implementation of evidence-based quality measures. Finally, they would increase the number of Intermediate Care (ICC) beds, establish a framework to study, assess, and accommodate the current utilization of and need for hospital beds for acute psychiatric care, and raise Medicaid reimbursement rates for behavioral health services to levels comparable to Medicare.

Bristol Hospital encourages the Committee to support SB 1098.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.