



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

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Testimony by Patricia Rehmer Commissioner
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Before the Housing Committee
February 17, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Winfield, Representative Butler and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. I am Pat Rehmer, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and I am here today to testify on SB 888, An Act Concerning Adequate and Safe Housing for the Elderly and Young Persons With Disabilities. I appreciate the Committee's commitment to addressing this difficult issue.

Commissioner Klein and I met about ten days ago to discuss this issue and to lay out some ways to address the problem. We looked at many of the suggestions outlined in SB 888.

We have some suggestions for this legislation as it moves forward. First, this bill assumes that persons with disabilities living in elderly/disabled housing are there because of a behavioral health issue. We have to remember that elderly/disabled housing includes persons with all disabilities: physical, developmental, as well as behavioral. We cannot assume that the problems come solely from the population we serve. "Young persons with disabilities" is a very broad category, and we will need to address ways in which we can look at all persons living in elderly/disabled housing, not solely persons with behavioral health disabilities.

We would like to respectfully request that if the bill moves forward, it includes representatives from the Departments on Aging, Developmental Services, and Rehabilitation Services, the Office for Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, and representation from the Independent Living Centers to broaden participation from other organizations that represent disability groups who currently live in elderly/disabled housing and are also on waiting lists for housing.

In addition, we would also like to ensure that we have enough time to complete this study in a thorough manner. We would like to respectfully request that you support the proposal from the Department of Housing to extend the reporting requirement in order for us to bring all the parties together and gather the necessary data.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.