



Testimony presented by Marcia DuFore

On behalf of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board

Before the Planning and Development Committee

February 16, 2015

IN OPPOSITION TO:

PROPOSED H.B. 5618 AND 6483

Senator Osten, Representative Miller and distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Planning and Development Committee,

I am writing to you with very mixed feelings, yet I must express our Board's opposition to H.B. 5618 An Act Concerning Community-Based Residential Facilities, and H.B. 6483 An Act Establish a Task Force to Study Group Home Distribution.

My name is Marcia DuFore. I am writing to you as Executive Director of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board (NCRMHB). Our Board's responsibility is to study the mental health needs of people in our region and assist the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) with setting priorities for improved and expanded services to meet those needs. Our constituents include people who use mental health and addiction services, their families and concerned citizens in the towns and cities where services are delivered.

One of our responsibilities is to ensure that the voice and interests of our constituents are represented in a variety of collaborative forums that have an impact on their health and well-being. In that capacity I am an active member of a Mayor's Task Force on Mental Health Issues in Manchester. The Task Force has drafted a series of recommendations to address the excessive costs they have incurred for emergency response to "emotionally distressed persons (EDP)" calls. The Task Force has conducted an extensive study of the sources of EDP calls and has come to some reasonable conclusions. One factor leading to the volume calls is the disproportionate number of facilities located in Manchester providing services to individuals who are "psychologically vulnerable." These include hospitals, community mental health clinics, Board and Care facilities, schools for students with special needs, group home and foster placements for children with special needs, and congregate settings for individuals with varying disabilities. A large proportion of EDP calls come from these settings.

A large proportion of Manchester police officers have received Crisis Intervention Training. They have an excellent reputation for the quality of their intervention in crisis situations. They work well with the local community, mental health providers, and hospitals in the area. However, they continue to be frustrated with the cost of a rising volume of EDP calls. As state agencies facilitate the movement for more and more people from state operated to community settings, they see more and more of the burden for ensuring the safety of those living environments resting on their shoulders - without the corresponding funding to cover their rising costs. They see their resources being diverted from ensuring community safety to

intervening in crises that should be more effectively managed by community care providers. As a result, they are searching for a statewide task force and legal means to call a moratorium on the establishment of any new mental health facilities in their community while Connecticut assesses the balance of distribution of placements statewide.

Our concerns for this proposed legislation center on the slippery slope that would be in its wake if town officials across the state were given new avenues to exclude individuals with disabilities from living in their communities based on their mental health status and needs. People with psychiatric disabilities face discrimination of many kinds and are protected class under both state and federal laws for good reason. Making their health information public in order to give communities the opportunity to accept or reject them as residents would violate these laws.

NCRMHB understands and empathizes with the financial concerns of Manchester and other communities in our Region who are supportive of their residents' needs. Their concerns should not go on deaf ears. However, finding solutions to their concerns requires thoughtful consideration. We find many of the concerns and resulting recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force to be valid. There is clearly a need for mandated conflict resolution and de-escalation training for support staff in settings where groups of individuals with disabilities are residing or receiving care. There is clearly a need for the availability of staff in those residences and clinical settings who have the skills and authority to assess the need for emergency hospital transport. There is clearly a need to consider all the costs and components of care required to ensure safety and success for individuals who are moving from state operated to community support settings. There is clearly a need for more and better outreach, engagement and follow-up services from state and community mental health providers for individuals who are disengaged, homeless, and living at risk in our communities.

We ask you to give thoughtful consideration to these issues, but proceed carefully in a way that does not lead to further discrimination for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Sincerely,

Marcia DuFore, Executive Director
North Central Regional Mental Health Board