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Testimony of the Mental Health Association of Connecticut (MHAC)

Before the Planning and Development Committee

February 13, 2015

Regarding

H.B. 5618: An Act Concerning Community-Based Residential Facilities

H.B. 6483: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Group Home Distribution

Senator Osten, Representative Miller, Senator Linares, Representative Aman and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee, I am Wendi Fralick, Senior Director of Advocacy with the Mental Health Association of Connecticut. As a statewide advocacy organization and direct service provider, the Mental Health Association of Connecticut assists people with mental illnesses and co-occurring disorders live integrated, healthy lives in our communities. I am here today to share my concerns related to **H.B. No. 5618: An Act Concerning Community-Based Residential Facilities** and **H.B. No. 6483: An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Group Home Distribution**.

As an advocacy organization, the Mental Health Association of Connecticut is committed to ensuring people with mental illnesses have access to the supports and services they need to live successful, integrated lives in our communities. This includes the ability to access housing, which is a cornerstone of achieving recovery. We are concerned that H.B. 5618 and H.B. 6483 will limit, and even potentially deny, access to housing for people with disabilities.

In terms of H.B. 5618, we oppose the mandate to notify town officials regarding the placement of community-based residential facilities and the requirement to review placements made by the state in such facilities. There is a process already in place to identify, select and place individuals in residential facilities. Mandating additional requirements around the placement of residential facilities and the

people placed in them adds red tape and the ability for communities to discriminate. If enacted, these requirements could be challenged under the Americans with Disabilities Act if they, in fact, do support the discrimination of people with disabilities.

While the Mental Health Association of Connecticut applauds efforts to determine the costs of community-based care versus institutional care, such cost comparisons have been done. In fact, in 2009, the National Council on Disability reported the average annual expenditure for state institutions was \$188,318 compared to an average of \$42,486 for Medicaid-funded home and community-based services. Other such comparisons reveal similar cost reductions. Thus, we find little value in directing costs and resources to further investigate these already-identified cost savings.

Furthermore, while expense reimbursements and staff training may be worthy, we cannot support this legislation as currently drafted.

As for H.B. 6483, we are concerned that this task force would create barriers preventing people with disabilities from living integrated lives in our communities. We would be better served by a task force dedicated to identifying strategies to expand affordable housing options for all Connecticut residents.

As representatives of your district's diverse population, we ask that you explore ways to ensure access to services and supports that promote health and wellness rather than support efforts that could have significant adverse effects on the lives of people with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.