

**Testimony before the Planning and Development Committee
February 13, 2015
In opposition to HB 5618 and HB 6483
Sarah Lombardo**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Miller and honorable members of the Committee. My name is Sarah Lombardo and this testimony is in the opposition to HB 5618 and HB 6483.

I know all the stereotypes. You see a group home moving in and you think the worst. However, let me tell you Honorable legislators, those clients moving in may very well be contributing members to society, if you would only let them.

Let me tell you, I am a social worker, with a concentration in community organization from UCONN School of Social Work. I have worked in many group homes, and you know what I have found? People who want to serve the community. From volunteering in a no-kill cat shelter to volunteering with the elderly as they chat and play games helping the older members of society enjoy the last years of their lives, they are contributing to society. We need these people in our neighborhood. They give; they get back, it's a win-win.

Mental illness is pervasive. The more people talk about it, the more others speak up. Maybe you don't know someone with it...but have you been mad, sad, confused, had a bunch of thoughts at once when there's a lot on your mind, or even really happy, so happy that your speech is a bit sped up? If you are honest with yourself you will see that you have had similar emotions from what someone with a mental illness has been challenged by. Maybe there's is a bit more intense, so they take medication to help control what your brain does automatically. If you think about it like that you'll realize how blessed you are. But honorable legislators, I digress.

Mental illness is not something to be afraid of. You don't need to interview your neighbors just so they can have the right to a home. Shelter is a basic need and housing people in a group home will help, not hinder your community. If you were diagnosed with an illness, any illness, would you want strangers to know about it? Or would you want to be able to put your best foot forward without having to watch your back, when all you really want to do is fit in and add to the community positively? Thank you from all those who will be impacted by this decision, and from myself for your attention to this matter of utmost importance.