

Distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Deborah Vitarelli and I am the Executive Director of The Waterbury Arc, 1929 East Main Street in Waterbury. I am writing in support of SB 1088. I believe it is imperative that this bill be passed WITH an actual closure date for STS as well as the Regional Centers. I understand the reluctance of families with family members at STS and agonize over the misinformation put out by the STS Home and School Association, who also happen to be guardians for many who reside at STS. I was not able to make the hearing in person but did listen to it on CT-N.

The residents of STS and the Regional Centers do not have any more significant disabilities than those who reside in the community. Our organization provides day services, employment services and individual and family support services to over 250 individuals with I/DD. I can tell you in all honesty that we provide community based services to individuals with PICA, Prader-Willi Syndrome, Alzheimer's, early onset dementia, special diets, and significant behavioral and medical needs. Our staff is certified in the administration of medication and we have a nurse on call, they are well versed in the use of Hoyer lifts, of which we have 3. They are first aid and CPR certified and we have an AED on site. All are trained in the de-escalation of behaviors as well as the use of the least restrictive restraints. We have several individuals who are deaf and use sign language to communicate. Our staff is racially diverse and we have a relatively low rate of turnover. Many of our staff members are also guardians for individuals who have lost their loved ones and they become part of their family. All our staff go above and beyond in caring for every person we serve and their families. Many of us have sat at the bedside of a dying client either to support the family or just to be there holding their hand as they take their last breath. We are monitored by DDS and their Quality Assurance Department on a regular basis.

Since STS was closed to admissions in 1986, children have been born and cared for in the community with the same conditions found at STS and the Regional Centers. There is no reason to continue to isolate individuals with I/DD behind the walls of an institution. I recognize the difficulties surrounding the closure with Union Contracts. However, Mansfield Training was closed by

Governor Lowell Weicker in 1993 with a stroke of a pen. So can STS and the Regional Centers.

I implore you to pass this bill and add a closure date. A lot can happen in 5 years and it makes practical sense to have an end date to this archaic practice of institutionalization.

Thank you for your kind time and attention.

Deborah Vitarelli

Executive Director