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H.B. 5531 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CARE AND TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS OR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.

Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and Respective Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Hilary Bryant and I am a resident of East Hampton, Connecticut.

I am an employee of Advocacy Unlimited, Inc. (AU), which is a statewide, peer-run, organization that is dedicated to improving the outcomes and wellbeing for individuals who experience mental health and co-occurring disorders ([www.mindlink.org](http://www.mindlink.org)). More specifically, I work as the Yoga Instructor and Holistic Health Coordinator for AU's wellness initiative called Toivo. Toivo's mission is to bring holistic healing modalities to this population, as well as others who experience barriers to practices such as yoga, meditation, qigong, sound healing, zumba and more ([toivocenter.org](http://toivocenter.org)).

I am here today to testify on H.B. 5531. The reason I am testifying today is because I am a person with lived experience. I received my first mental health diagnosis when I was thirteen. For the next seven years I would see countless therapists, psychiatrists, attend groups, learn CBT and DBT, and try just about every medication known to man. When my "treatment-resistant depression" did not improve in response to these methods I began to cycle in and out of outpatient, inpatient and residential treatment programs. Finally, after six failed suicide attempts, I received multiple rounds of electroshock treatment, a period of my life I am fortunate enough not to have to remember.

Through these experiences I witnessed force first hand. I witnessed events that would make anyone sick to their stomach. I was always left wondering how these facilities could get away with treating individuals outside of the scope of humanity, sometimes even outside of the scope of the law it seemed. How was this in our best interest? How was this keeping us safe? How did they not see that these actions traumatized everyone involved?

It was in spite of these methods of so-called "treatment" that I got to the place I am today. It was in spite of the therapy, groups and outpatient programs that I was forced to partake in after discharge that I have been able to find healing. My healing journey did not begin within the medical model, it began on my yoga mat.

Through the practice of yoga I began to reunite my mind and body, formerly two separate entities, each miserable in their own right. Yoga helped me to explore and reconnect with the body I had abandoned and abused for years. My pain and sadness had caused me to live exclusively in my mind - my body merely a battleground for my inner wars. Through yoga and meditation, I slowly began to love myself again, learning to treat myself with care and respect. I felt a greater sense of self-awareness and a sense of connection to something greater. This was a drastic contrast to the days when I felt as if god had forgotten about me, or like I was a mistake not meant for this world.

The practice continues to open new doors for me, showing me new pathways to healing, introducing me to new healing communities and teaching me new ways to look at myself and my experiences.

Not only do I experience peace, stability, joy and hope today, but I also experience the gift of purpose. At Toivo, I am fortunate enough to share the healing power of yoga that I have experienced with others who are struggling with mental health and co-occurring disorders. It is amazing to see individuals connect with these modalities for the first time after exhausting all the traditional treatment options.

I am testifying against H.B. 5531 because I know from my own experience that we do not need more force, we need more alternatives. We need to stop numbing and start enlivening. We need to stop subduing and start empowering. Most importantly, we need to stop traumatizing, and start healing.

This will not happen with the passing of H.B. 5531. I implore you to consider this testimony and the many other powerful testimonies you will hear to make the best, most informed choice.

Thank you.