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Windsor, Connecticut

Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2016

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

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Respective members of the Judiciary Committee, including Senator Kissell and Representative Baram,

My name is Michaela I. Fissel and I am a resident and active member of the Windsor community. I am here to testify in strong opposition to HB 5531.

As a person in long-term recovery from a "serious mental illness", I am keenly aware of the practices implemented within an inpatient setting to force individuals to comply with inadequate treatment.

It was not even a decade ago that I was wandering the streets of Hartford seeking my next high and entering into a state of psychosis. I can assure you, that if my mother had the option to encourage forced medication, she would have upon me entering the hospital for a once month stint following a suicide attempt. If my mother were alive today she could attest to the fear, anger, and loss of control that she felt during that time in our lives.

The thing is, everything I experienced from adolescence through the early years of my young adulthood was a reflection of the significant and prolonged trauma that I experienced as a child. I just can't help but wonder how many of children in my son's school who are being disciplined for non-compliance, are actually expressing an internal emotional struggle, and why aren't we giving them time with loving and compassionate adult?

Since achieving recovery at the age of 21, I have dedicated my professional career to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to achieve recovery - going as far as to dedicate my graduate studies, and tens of thousands of dollars, to the study emerging adults as a behavioral health service population.

Since 2009 I have produced three independent reports that have describe the state of recovery for young people in Connecticut, offering numerous recommendations that can improve outcomes for young people who are currently engaged in behavioral health services.

At no time over the past seven years has a theme emerged to indicate that forced treatment is a best practice.

On the contrary, young people report that they are already being forced to comply with treatment, and currently the most readily available options fail to meet person centeredness or authentic recovery orientation. I have found that it is only through sheer luck that a young person successfully achieves recovery and transitions into adulthood within a context that limits their self-determination and overall autonomy.

This legislation is not only a violation of a person's constitutional rights, but it will put us back into the era of institutionalization. We have come so far as the state, with innovative solutions that have yet to be fully invested in. It is imperative that we stand as a beacon of hope within a country that is driven by fear and pharmaceuticals.

I would ask that you vote against H.B. 5531, and then you reach out to the advocacy community to hear what working for those who have successfully navigated the service systems and have achieved a life of self-defined purpose. I believe that you have probably heard from experts in recovery here today who can be called upon to assist you to move our state forward.

Please feel free to email me at michaela@advocacyunlimited.org to receive additional information about the research that I have conducted on recovery during the transition to adulthood here in Connecticut. I would be honored to be of assistance