

Testimony Relating to HB 5531

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

Before the Judiciary Committee: March 18, 2016

*Senator Eric Coleman and Representative William Tong and members of the Judiciary
Committee.*

My name is Edwin Norse, I live in Meriden, and I have previously served for three years as Chair of the Board of Mental Health Connecticut, serving most of the area of Western Connecticut for individuals who struggle with mental illness.

There are some areas of human interaction where decisions dictated by state laws are not warranted. This is one of them.

An appropriate analogous example of this is the difficulties posed by the Terry Schiavo case of many years ago in Florida. You may recall the decision hinged on when to pull the plug if someone was in a vegetative state. What you are not likely aware of is the language and footnotes of the third appeal, suggesting to the lower court judge that she be examined by competent medical authority, having been denied such for several years. In speaking with the person who wrote a good deal of that order, I questioned why this had been something hung up in legal appeals, when the parents were willing to continue the care for her. The reply was telling. "There are certain areas the law is not made for," was her reply.

What is before you is a similar dilemma. Do we force, making use a court appointed conservator, perhaps with legal but with no social service or medical experience? Or, do we allow for the human intervention among those focused on health care, treatment, and wellness to treat those difficult situations on a case-by-case basis?

There will always be difficult issues in the mental health care community of this nature, but crossing the line into forcing is not an appropriate answer. Among those states which have adopted such legislation some 70% are reported to not enforce due to cost or difficulty in enforcement.

With all due respect for the knowledge and talents of those here serving on the Judiciary Committee, I would urge your rejection of this bill.

s/ Edwin M. Norse
Edwin M. Norse
Former Chair
Mental Health Connecticut