

Testimony by Louise Pyers
Before Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2016

In Opposition

HB: 5531 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE CARE AND TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS OR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER.

Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Louise Pyers and I am the Criminal Justice Project Director for NAMI Connecticut. I am speaking in opposition to HB 5531: An Act Concerning the Care and Treatment of Persons with a Mental Illness or Substance Abuse Disorder.

While a conservator may truly believe that forced medication is in the best interests of the person struggling with a mental illness or substance use disorder, it has been shown that this practice has very little long term benefit in terms of positive outcomes. Positive outcomes are associated with the building of trusted relationships and ongoing support for the individual while he or she chooses whatever option works for them. Often, the combination of support and treatment can result in greater likelihood of success.

In addition, the bill states, "A conservator of the person appointed pursuant to subsection (b) of this section may request that state or local police or a licensed or certified ambulance service assist in transporting the patient to a designated location for the purpose of administering the medication."

Asking police to forcibly take people into custody for purposes of administering medication may have some additional challenges. Currently under State Statute 17 a-503, the police can take people into custody if they are at imminent risk of harming themselves or others or are gravely disabled. If the person does not meet these specific criteria, a police officer does not have probable cause to take a person into custody. In addition, the very act of having to forcibly take a person into custody for the purposes of administering medications without a threat to public safety can leave both police and people in crisis open to injury and liability. It can put the police and the people they are trying to help in a very vulnerable and untenable situation.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted by,

Louise Pyers, M.S., NAMI Connecticut