



**Testimony of Children's Mental Health Connecticut
Before the Committee on Children
March 3, 2016
Regarding**

House Bill 5301—AN ACT CONCERNING OPIOID ANALGESIC PRESCRIPTIONS ISSUED TO MINORS

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban, and members of the Committee on Children. My name is Susan Kelley and I am the Children's Policy Manager for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut, and staff to the Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH). ACMH's name has been in flux because it is a new statewide advocacy and policy coalition and finding a unique name/acronym has been challenging. ACMH grew out of the Keep the Promise Children's Committee and comprises a broad spectrum of stakeholders in children's mental health. Abby Anderson, Executive Director of Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA), and Ann Smith, Executive Director of African Caribbean Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP) are the interim co-chairs of ACMH. ACMH seeks to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality mental health services that are family-centered and culturally responsive. I am here today on behalf of ACMH and NAMI CT to express concerns regarding HB 5301.

ACMH is very cognizant of the need to find solutions to stem the opioid epidemic that many states and their residents are facing, including Connecticut. This crisis and its devastating impact on families and loved ones have affected me on a personal level. This summer, the close childhood friend of our 21 year old daughter died of a heroin overdose in Los Angeles. She had been in rehab, but as so often is the case, she needed more help and time to recover.

We appreciate the good intentions of HB 5301, but believe legislation focused on education and preventative strategies informing all patients on the dangers of opioids will more directly and effectively address this important issue than looking at parental consent for minors.

At a recent roundtable on opioids and youth, held by U.S. Senator Blumenthal at the Community Mental Health Affiliate in New Britain, clinicians and experts stressed that diversion of opioids, not prescription, is the main factor behind abuse of pain medication and opioids by minors who access leftover pain medication in their homes. In addition, youth often first abuse pain medication--which then leads to use of cheaper extremely potent opiates such as heroin--because they mistakenly believe that "prescribed" pills are okay. HB 5301 would not impact this destructive path to abuse and addiction.

Currently, minors generally do not have an independent right to prescription drugs. Minors also do not have access to opioid analgesics drugs without parental permission except in very limited circumstances where they might be necessary. It would also be a rarity for a minor to access opioids in an outpatient mental health scenario. These facts, in addition to HB 5301's exclusion of surgeries and emergencies, means that

the bill would have little if any effect on 98 percent of the instances when a minor would get an opioid prescribed.

Importantly, HB 5301 would also not impact a critical age group of young people that are very much at risk, if not more so, than teens--those who are 19-25 years old.

We respectfully suggest that a more effective approach, rather than singling out minors and mandating parent consent, would be to pursue educational and preventative strategies that inform all patients on the dangers of opioids and its highly addictive qualities, and the need to destroy unused opioids to prevent diversion.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Kelley
Alliance for Children's Mental Health
Members include:

AFCAMP
CTJJA
Stamford Youth Services
Empowering Children and Families
NAMI Connecticut
FAVOR
Connecticut Legal Services
Office of the Child Advocate
Connecticut Voices for Children
Center for Children's Advocacy
The Village for Children and Families
Children Guidance Clinics of CT
Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation
Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, CT
CT Association of School Based Health Centers
Kids in Crisis
Connecticut Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents

