



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Miriam Delphin- Rittmon Ph.D.
Commissioner

Memorandum:

TO: Labor and Public Employees Committee

FROM: Commissioner Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., DMHAS

DATE: March 3, 2016

SUBJECT: Written Testimony on House Bill 5237

Greetings, Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, Senator Hwang, Representative Rutigliano and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. I am Commissioner Miriam Delphin-Rittmon of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and I would like to speak in favor of the ideas being raised H.B. No. 5237 AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR CHANCE EMPLOYMENT.

DMHAS clients' experiences with mental health and/or addiction issues may increase their chances of coming into contact with law enforcement. Our data shows that many of the men and women across the state that receive DMHAS services have been or are currently involved in the criminal justice system. This contact may adversely impact their chances of employment. Employment is a valuable part of the recovery process and is often a tool that assists recovery. Through the employment process, individuals find a positive purpose and meaning in their lives.

Unfortunately many people are not able to get "a foot in the door" of a prospective employer due to the criminal history question on job applications. Providing the opportunity to have an interview would allow candidates to be evaluated on their current merits, not past mistakes.

The State of Connecticut through DMHAS has invested in employment services for individuals with mental health and/or substance use disorders for several years. Using the evidence-based treatment model of Supported Employment, also known as the Individual, Placement and Support (IPS) model, DMHAS and its network of more than 30 providers help more than 3000 individuals per year with employment services. As we have improved our implementation of these services, the employment rate of individuals we serve has been rising over the past three to four years, reaching more than 40% currently. This is great progress. In addition, DMHAS sought and was awarded in 2014 a 5-year federal SAMHSA grant focused on supported employment services. This was the first discretionary SAMHSA grant directed at this topic. Through these federal dollars CT is enhancing employment services in Hartford for Latinos and in New Haven for those with criminal justice involvement, who also have mental illness.

While supportive of the concept raised in H.B. 5237 section d (3) is of concern to the Department. DMHAS serves a vulnerable population that may be at risk for abuse. As such, prior felony convictions must be weighed carefully prior to hiring even if they occurred in the distant past. Section d (3) would limit the ability of the Department to fully execute this step, potentially jeopardizing our clients.

All individuals should have the opportunity to strive to meet their full potential and lead productive lives as taxpaying, law abiding citizens. Employment is more than just a livelihood; it provides structure, a sense of identity and social support. It is a means to support oneself and one's family, and lowers the rates of recidivism. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.