

Testimony before the Health subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee
Re: H.B. No. 5044 *An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017*
February 18, 2016
Cheri Bragg, Portland, CT

Good evening Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, and distinguished members of the Health subcommittee of Appropriations. My name is Cheri Bragg and I am a registered voter from Portland. I am also a Board member of CLRP (CT Legal Rights Project), an organization that provides representation to DMHAS eligible clients by paralegals and attorneys on rights matters pertaining to housing, education, employment, and treatment of their choice. I am also the daughter of a person who received this invaluable representation.

Tuesday evening I listened to Governor Malloy speak about defining and prioritizing core government services. The Appropriations budget process was the one way mentioned that the public could have input into defining what those core services are. **The services that CLRP delivers ARE core services that must continue to be protected.** Representation of people in the community helps to promote self-sufficiency, which includes promoting people in obtaining education and getting and keeping jobs which promotes healthy communities and economy. If people are able to live in safe, affordable housing and are supported in their right to pursue education and employment, not only are we increasing the health and wellbeing of people living in our communities, but we are greatly saving the heavy taxpayer costs of institutional and emergency care at the same time. For example, representation in a housing case costs \$806; in contrast, a private hospital stay costs the state \$1,089/day; inpatient psychiatric care \$1,157/day; one ER visit \$2,152. Maintaining safe, stable, affordable housing is a cost-effective way to sustain the recovery of DMHAS clients living in the community and avoid the use of more expensive services. Investing in CLRP's services clearly makes sense!

It is also important to clarify that part of CLRP's funding comes from a consent decree which is enforceable by court order. This was not taken into account under the proposed budget as CLRP's entire line item was included in the consolidated agency operating fund line (which was then reduced by 5.75%). I encourage the committee to closely look at CLRP's testimony by Executive Director Kathy Flaherty for further clarification.

If core services are defined as services that our state "must have", and that to lose them would have negative consequences on the health & well-being of our communities, then CLRP fits the bill. CLRP protects rights that people already have, rights that are guaranteed by our laws, but which might be trampled on without advocacy and legal representation. There are countless examples of this – my family has just one of many. My mother received representation from CLRP which assisted her in keeping the

conservator of her choice and also in determining the treatment of her choice. Without this representation, perhaps well-meaning, but definitely ill-informed people made it clear

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that they would have inserted their own opinions instead of ascertaining and zealously advocating for my mother's wishes as required by law. This representation was critically important to her as she was often subjected over her lifetime to people and systems that have often completely disregarded her rights and her voice by taking that power from her. After intervention by CLRP, she was able to state her rights, refuse costly, forced treatment that had not worked multiple times in the past and keep the conservator of her choice, her daughter, as opposed to being assigned to a random lawyer who would never meet her, let alone get to know her and her wishes.

CLRP also goes above and beyond important individual advocacy and seeks to educate other parties such as probate court lawyers, nursing facilities, landlords, administrators, and other people in positions of power to make important and even life-altering decisions that affect many people in our communities. Examples of this highly cost-effective systems advocacy and change include training people to assist with Advanced Directives, creating performance standards for certain probate proceedings, and working with other organizations to provide education about the rights of people they serve in common. I urge the committee to preserve CLRP's funding and DMHAS funding including items like W.I.S.E. (the mental health waiver), that can clearly improve peoples' quality of life while saving the state unnecessary costs at the same time. To eliminate these services equates to subjecting CT taxpayers to the dual costs of lives and dollars.

Thank you for your time in reading my testimony.