



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR  
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
60B WESTON STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06120-1551

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, REGULATION AND  
PROTECTION SUBCOMMITTEE on *H.B. 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE  
EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017*

February 18, 2016

Craig Henrici, Executive Director

Co-chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Good afternoon. I am here to submit testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP). As with all funding of Connecticut State Agencies during this difficult budgetary process, the specific line item for CLRP was eliminated, and their funding consolidated into the single line item that the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) has the discretion to allocate. As a core service of DMHAS, CLRP's individualized funding should be maintained and should not be cut.

CLRP was created as the result of a law suit filed by the then Connecticut Civil Liberties Union (CCLU) in 1989 against the then Department of Mental Health (now the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services - DMHAS). Now, firmly established as one of the leading public interest law firms in Connecticut that provides legal and advocacy services to individuals with psychiatric illness, CLRP provides a broad range of legal services, including services related to psychiatric inpatient hospital issues, housing, general civil rights issues, and issues impacting individuals in the community. These are all services that are necessary to protect the civil rights of individuals with psychiatric illness, and to enable such individuals to live in the community rather than being forced back into psychiatric institutions.

The only discretionary funding in CLRP's budget is for their housing work. Funding related to services to the inpatient community is required by the consent decree that established CLRP and those services are a priority. However, the loss of CLRP's ability to represent individuals in housing cases will have a severe impact on their client population. Maintaining safe and affordable housing is key to enable individuals with psychiatric disabilities to maintain recovery. Without that safety net, individuals run the very real risk of institutionalization, which is the very thing CLRP's housing work is designed to prevent.

However, CLRP doesn't know how their funding will be impacted given the current budgetary format. Because of that, it is impossible for them to plan or prioritize their work. Previous budgetary proposals would have devastated CLRP's housing work and required that they lay off so many people that all their work would have been compromised. They would be forced to provide only basic services to the growing inpatient population. The danger remains that this is what may finally happen. That is certainly not what this administration wants to see and is short sighted as DMHAS would be required to spend more and more money on inpatient services. We therefore ask that CLRP's specific budget line be reinstated as a core service at the current funding level.