

Testimony of Mark Soboslai, Esq.
Opposition of H.B. 5044
Appropriations Committee
February 18, 2016

Good evening Honorable Senators and Representatives. My name is Mark Soboslai. I am an attorney in private practice in Westport and I presently serve as President of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP.) I am here to testify in support of CLRP.

Preliminarily and as many of you know CLRP came into existence 25 years ago as the result of a Consent Decree resolving a suit in the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut.

The mandate of that Decree provided that CLRP staff provide legal advocacy and support services for:

“all present and future indigent patients of inpatient facilities funded or operated by the Conn Department of Mental Health who are or will be in need of legal assistance....”

Over the years, those core services have included advocacy for many, many indigent patients with mental illness to *obtain* housing upon discharge into the community and to *remain in* their housing.

While some of our funding is guaranteed by that Court Order, there is a significant portion of our funding that is subsumed under the line item for “legal services” and those are the funds that will be cut based on the proposed Budget.

This funding is included under the umbrella of the funding for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) in the “CONSOLIDATED AGENCY” Summary.

Therefore the 5.75 across-the-board reductions applied to Agency Operating Funds of DMHAS will severely impact CLRP’s ability to

continue their much needed work on behalf of indigent persons with severe mental illness in this State.

Essentially, these critically important services for our most vulnerable citizens with severe mental illness will be eliminated.

The executive team and staff of lawyers and paralegals work tirelessly to assist our clients with many of their most basic and essential needs such as obtaining housing and securing income by representing clients in Social Security disability hearings and appeals.

The staff has already been hit with an unpaid furlough day every month. If these budget cuts are approved, not only will the current and prospective clients of CLRP be harmed; it will inevitably lead to the loss of jobs for an already limited staff.

Another logical and likely effect of such cuts is to insure that more people who would otherwise remain out of the hospital in the community in their homes will inevitably require inpatient hospitalization at a significant increase in the cost per client.

From the standpoint of cost effectiveness, this impact is straightforward:

It costs about \$806 per day to allow CLRP to continue to protect a client's housing. Whereas, the daily cost for inpatient hospitalization is from \$1,157 to \$2,152 per day.

On behalf of the dedicated staff and the clients of CLRP, I truly hope that you will continue your commitment as a vital partner with CLRP to allow these very special lawyers and paralegals to continue assisting our most vulnerable citizens to have a safe and decent place to call home.