Concerns re: **HB 7148**, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIAL ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR. [Specifically, Appropriations regarding the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.]

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I’m the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order which mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community. I’m also the Co-Chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP). KTP is a coalition of advocates (people living with mental health conditions, family members, mental health professionals and interested community members) with a vision of a state in which people with mental health conditions are able to live successfully in the community because they have access to housing and other community-based supports and services that are recovery oriented, person-driven and holistic in their approach to wellness. Lastly, I’m a member of the steering committee of the Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance, an alliance of people of all ages with all disabilities who pursue a unified agenda.
We appreciate that the Governor has proposed a budget for the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities that reflects adjustments for state employee wage adjustments pursuant to the terms of the state employee collective bargaining agreement.

CHRO is a state agency that provides a vital service to the clients we serve. We represent clients every year in CHRO proceedings related to violations of our clients’ fair housing rights. We know that many people have to represent themselves in CHRO proceedings, because we are unable to represent every person who calls us for assistance.

It is important to preserve adequate funding for a system in which a person who has experienced discrimination does not need to hire an attorney to start the complaint process. In an ideal world, increasing the CHRO’s funding would enable them to hire additional staff to meet the needs of both complainants and respondents – first, to assist those people who claim that their rights have been violated; second, to timely investigate and resolve cases so that the due process rights of respondents are protected; and finally, to have the resources to pursue litigation when necessary to protect civil and human rights.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with CHRO to educate the community about their legal rights.