Karen Healy Testimony at the Legislative Office Building

Appropriations committee March 1, 2019

My personal testimony regarding HB 7148

Good evening Senator Osten, Rep Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Karen Healy, I live in Hartford and I am here to share my personal testimony regarding HB 7148.

I was institutionalized between Poughkeepsie, New York and Hartford, Connecticut. I spent most of my time in State Hospitals for self-inflicted behavior from the 1989, until December 2014. I was put into psychiatric hospitals off and on, since about age 16 up until December 4, 2014.

I believe people who enter psych facility with severe psychiatric issues and other disabilities should not be placed in psychiatric hospitals. During my time at Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) in Middletown, I reported having been physically, sexually, and emotional abused. When I reported to the correct people at CVH hospital the agency police officers would come up to take a statement. But, even though I had bruises etc. they would not believe me most of the time. Instead, they would remove the accused staff for 90 days while an investigation took place.

My own experience being inpatient on Battell Hall at CVH was not good. Every time after I inflicted self-harmful behaviors, which including cutting myself and inserting foreign objects, they would right away put me on 1:1 status. I was not given items to help comfort me during the 1:1 observation. The 1:1 room did not have windows. It contained only a bed and nothing else. The worse part for me was not having my music or any fresh air either.

I hated just sitting around a big day room with screens covering windows. Other patients were in the day room as well. Some of them would just sit like a ball and fall asleep. This did not help me to get better mentally.
I believe people who enter psych facility with severe issues and disabilities, just having them sit around in a day room or in bed with no activities to help them learn about their illness, without any structure is not good at all.

Just sitting in a ball, sleeping for hours is not going to get them better either. They may become more depressed or more violent towards themselves or others.

While I was there at CVH, I had witnessed staff putting hands on patients, causing bruises. There was a lot of verbal abuse, making fun of people in the day room in front of everybody.

I saw people who did not speak English or Spanish unable to talk or communicate with staff. Interpreters should have been available to help with communication. But sometimes were only available once a week.

What I would really truly like to see is for staff to be better trained in how to deal with patients disabilities. I would also like to see people to be together according to their needs, so they can get appropriate treatment and return to the community and be successful.

Patients need legal rights, they need patient advocates who are not employed by the institution, and who are independent and free to speak. I have the right to the correct psychiatric treatment and the right physical treatment. For example, when in CVH, I was supposed to have a special aquatic therapy for serve hip problems and rarely had them.

People doubted me, they felt I would always be a screw up and institutionalized. However, there was a number of staff who did believe in me. It was through their efforts, as well as my family, that I was able to be discharged from CVH December 4th of 2014. During my final case conference at CVH, my mother, who at the time, was my conservator of person, and estate. She was told to never let me have my hip surgery because it was believed that I could not handle the surgery. They said expected me to be back in one or two weeks following my December 4th 2014 discharge.
It's been over 4 years since I was discharged from CVH. I have had my hip surgery. I am no longer in need of a wheelchair or walker. I now have a paid part time job. I also volunteer at my church. I have gone through many weeks of withdrawal from the high dose of narcotics I was given while at CVH.

People should not be judged because they have long-term psychiatric illness. Everyone deserves the chance to be treated well and have as normal a life as possible

Thank you for listening to my testimony today.