

Testimony on SB 1: An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic

Public Health Committee

March 16, 2021

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Ranking Members Hwang, Somers and Petit and other esteemed members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Win Evarts. I live in Norwalk with my wife and 30-year-old son with an intellectual disability and I'm the executive director of The Arc Connecticut, our state's oldest and largest advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the rights of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) and promoting opportunities for their inclusion in the full lives of their community.

The Arc Connecticut supports SB 1 because health disparities are significant in Connecticut and they are a major impediment to individuals with and without disabilities in their quest to build great lives in our state. This bill is an important effort to change this situation and we hope for its passage with two modifications to allay our concerns.

The first modification is that Section 2 should be struck and support should be thrown behind passage of HB 6588 which would enable a holistic, representative approach to informing peer support workforce development. There is also a concern about community representation on the reparations commission.

The second modification is an amendment to SB 1: a statutory requirement that the Connecticut Department of Public Health do what other states have already done, either before or after the arrival of COVID-19, and issue uniform state guidance to all hospitals prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, disability, or age in the event that life-saving treatments must be rationed.

Over 30 advocacy organizations have been asking DPH for this guidance since March of 2020. While one CT hospital has adopted guidelines which address all of the advocates' concerns, the latest information provided by CT hospitals to DPH and shared with advocates shows the disparities and dangers of the lack of a uniform state policy, with nearly two-thirds failing to include adequate policies to protect against discriminatory practices and some including discriminatory written guidelines.

It's abundantly clear that without legislative action, no timely action will be taken to adopt uniform anti-discrimination guidelines that should arguably be at the core of DPH's mission. This divisive and highly undesirable situation can be solved with your help.

Thank you for your effort to improve the lives of all the people in Connecticut.

Win Evarts, Executive Director

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