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PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Testimony Opposing Raised SB 1085
An Act Concerning Suicide Prevention
March 29, 2021

Senator Abrams, Rep. Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Cathy Ludlum, and I am in the unfortunate position of testifying against An Act Concerning Suicide Prevention as it is currently written. The intention of this bill was to strengthen Connecticut's suicide prevention system, but SB 1085 would dismantle the existing body that has been so successful in its work: the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board.

CTSAB is a unique blend of state agency representatives, nonprofit organizations, schools and colleges, the military, and a variety of other groups and individuals who all share a passion for preventing suicide. CTSAB has been able to accomplish so much because membership is open to anyone, and this has invited a diversity of perspectives and a wealth of knowledge.

As a representative of Second Thoughts Connecticut, a grassroots disability advocacy organization, I have had the privilege of participating with CTSAB for the last eight years. Connecticut is the only state where disability is listed as one of the at-risk populations, and where concrete steps are identified to address unmet needs. We should be proud of this, along with the fact that Connecticut has one of the lowest suicide rates in the nation.

CTSAB's approach has been working!

Unfortunately, the current bill does not recognize the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board we have now. It would replace it with a bureaucratic model that could never be as effective. While Connecticut's decades-old statute to create a suicide prevention entity definitely needs to be updated, please do not replace it in a way that unravels all that has been accomplished in recent years.

There are numerous problems with SB 1085. To start, it does not align with CTSAB's mission and vision, as well as its acclaimed *Connecticut Suicide Prevention Plan 2025*. It takes apart the extensive infrastructure that has been put in place, including the creation of Regional Suicide Advisory Boards. Further, it does not acknowledge that CTSAB is currently the federally mandated advisory board for suicide prevention initiatives in Connecticut. Nor does the bill support the joint state agency leadership approach so necessary to have a real impact in different settings and among a diversity of populations. Finally, it fails to balance

efforts across the lifespan with attention to youth initiatives. Although youth should not be the only focus of suicide prevention, every reference to youth has been eliminated from SB 1085, which is going from one extreme to the other.

There are more issues with the legislation, but I will leave those for others to discuss.

We have a real opportunity to give official recognition to the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board, to build on the extensive work already done, and to provide some resources to do even more. Unfortunately, that would be a different bill.

Based on all the issues with SB 1085, I encourage you to commit to a total rewrite of this bill; or better yet, to table it until the 2022 session. Allowing more time would make it possible to prepare legislation that will actually accomplish what the drafters and the suicide prevention community envisioned.

Thank you for your time.