

**Testimony before the Public Health Committee
on Whiting Forensic Division of CVH and the Mental Health System
Katherine Curtis
Nov. 13, 2017**

Good afternoon Senators Gerratana and Somers, Representative Steinberg and members of the Committee.

Thank you for your service on my behalf and the behalf of others affected by the atrocious aspects of the mental health services system in Connecticut. My name is Katherine Curtis, a resident of New Haven, Connecticut and I vote. I have both worked in the Connecticut mental health system (as among other roles, a group-home manager and advocate) and have been a recipient of its services for many years. On occasion, my issue with severe generalized anxiety has landed me in hospitals where only the physical symptoms were addressed (I know that this is counter to what many people with mental illness diagnoses experience – where only their “mental illnesses” are addressed by hospital staff).

I have long been an advocate for people who, due to their special circumstance of extreme mental states (diagnosed with conditions such as “schizophrenia”, “depression”, “bipolar”, “borderline personality disorder”, etc.) receive less than helpful care from a system that is supposed to exist to provide assistance towards mental health. Instead of which, if they didn’t suffer from PTSD before, they have added that condition after they have experienced our current mental health system. Instead of improving our lives, our current mental health system causes more traumas layered on top of past traumas and mental health issues.

As the conditions at Whiting Forensic are now finally coming to light, we have the opportunity to have our voices heard on the state of the mental health system in this state. Please do not assume, that just because the abuse of one man has been revealed that others are not receiving the same or worse abuses within our mental health system institutions for many years. These abuses and worse have been going on for a long time, but the whistle-blowers (of which I was one in 1989) have been ignored because the focus of their concerns were “crazy people.”

I am asking the Public Health Committee today to create a task force to investigate, review and promote change in Connecticut’s broken mental health system overall. In creating this task force it will be imperative to ensure that the majority of the participants in the task force be persons with lived experience as recipients of the Connecticut mental health system (DMHAS). At least 51% of the task force members should be persons with “lived experience.” In this way, we can be assured that our needs are being addressed in the most effective and positive way.

I thank you for serving our state and me in discharging your duties to protect the public health of all people in our wonderful State of Connecticut. I am confident that you will help us to help ourselves through the creation of this important task force for mental health in Connecticut.

