

Paul Acker Testimony before Public Health Committee
November 13, 2017

Good afternoon Senators Gerratana and Somers, Representative Steinberg and the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Paul Acker. I'm a registered voter from the town of Portland. I am also the Chief of Staff at Advocacy Unlimited.

I'm sure we can all agree the events that came to light in April over the abuse of one the people residing at Whiting is wrong and should never happen again. It is folly to think this just happened, as it is my understanding letters were found in the victim's chart claiming abuse ten years ago. While I feel those charged with the crimes should be punished to the full extent of the law, I think we must as a state look at overall mental health system, both private and public, to see if it is serving the needs of people in distress with dignity and respect.

Having worked in the system for eleven years and a lifetime of interactions with the system from the other side, I can say it does not. A system that should be about restoring human connection to someone having extreme emotional distress is just about medication and control. We do not look at our system because we have pre-defined "experts" with nothing but financial gain on their end tell us this is what's needed. They will tell you they use evidence based practices and not you hospitalization is not ine of them. In fact, someone entering the hospital suicidal is one hundred times more like to complete the suicide within two weeks after hospitalization.

Unfortunately, it is a system that transfers human connection to pharmaceuticals and holds many meetings on how to expedite that process. CVH and many hospitals were started when Moral Therapy was all the rage. Although there were still problems, the Quakers in England believed when you treat someone like brethren their chances for improving increase. We have long departed from that belief. Abuses in the system are wide spectrum. Yet we know the denial of human rights from one group is the denial of human rights from all groups.

We at Advocacy Unlimited want to help. We want to use our experiences in the system to shape what comes out of this tragedy. We are asking for a workgroup to take a long hard look at the service delivery of mental health and ways we can better service the people of Connecticut, The current model is falling, and it's not due to a lack of funds. We know we must do better and know that we can.

Paul Acker