

May 12, 2025

Good Morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is April Kerr. I am a resident of Farmington, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD1866, An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding the State-designated Agency Advocating for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness.

With the end of the Consent Decree in the not too distant past, it's imperative to secure the placement of the mental health advocates so they can continue doing the crucial work needed to save lives, protect rights, and improve services for our peers. They need someone willing to be the watchdogs for them. Someone willing to go into the highways and byways where people are struggling to survive, and help them find their way out. We need advocates in place to prevent abuse and exploitation of some of our most vulnerable people as they work through some of the most trying times of their lives. Advocates will fight for people who lose their freedoms because they have a mental health diagnosis or are experiencing a major crisis due to various things that affect one's mental state, including but not limited to a urinary tract infection (UTI). Yes, that's right, (for those of you who may not know), something as common as a UTI causes induced delirium in elderly patients. I witnessed it when caring for my mother in her last days. It was horrifying to see such a thing. But I was there to help her through it. At a later date, I oversaw her going into a nursing facility for rehab. Again, I found myself checking on her and making sure that she was being cared for in a way that was needed. Not everyone has someone looking out for them when they end up very sick or in the hospital, or when they lose their home and find themselves suddenly living in their car or a tent. We are seeing this more and more these days. People are left behind, feeling broken and lost, or paralyzed mentally. They try to make their way through it, but they are scoffed at or overlooked like the leftovers that keep getting put back in the refrigerator until you don't recognize them anymore and eventually discard them. These advocates have been in place for a very short time and have been tremendously impactful as they have traveled through the state looking for those who are lost or

broken. They are people who are in danger of being displaced from their homes or have already been displaced for various reasons, but don't know where to turn for help or don't even understand why or how they got to where they are. These advocates need to be put in statute to prevent any future administration from removing them or their funding.

In closing, I urge you to PASS LD1866.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

April L. Kerr

Farmington

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

- Advocacy that has been required under the AMHI consent decree for the last 30 + years
- To save lives
- To improve services
- To lead policy reform
- To be the watchdogs, preventing abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- To continue the fight against forced treatment that doesn't work
- To be the balanced voice against all of those who believe in forced treatment and institutionalization
- To talk about coercion and try to stamp it out
- To be the voice for people whose voices are stolen and silenced
- To bear witness in inpatient facilities
- To stand up for what is wrong
- To monitor treatment in community settings and file grievances when people's rights are violated,
- To represent people who are evicted and prevent homelessness.
- To assist people in keeping their jobs when they are fired due to a label
- To ensure that forced sterilization and forced