

Testimony before the Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2008
Support for HB 5495

Good afternoon Senator Meyer, Representative McMahon, and honorable members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Cheri Bragg, Keep the Promise Coalition Coordinator, and I am here today to testify in support of HB 5495, An Act Concerning the Transition of Youth from the care of the Department of Children and Families to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Keep the Promise is a statewide coalition dedicated to advocating for the “Blue Ribbon Solutions” necessary to maintain and expand critical mental health services for adults and children and housing options to meet their needs.

There has been an increasing number of Young Adults being referred for services in DMHAS who are coming out of the DCF system of care. This is a positive sign because only a few years ago, the referral process was not in place and many young adults fell through the cracks resulting in unmet needs and costly crisis services. Unfortunately, needed supports, including supportive housing, have not kept pace with the demand for services resulting in an increasing percentage of young adults who have been needlessly detained at Cedarcrest Hospital. In other words, they are ready to be discharged, but are unable to leave due to a lack of safe, affordable housing with support services.

Although there have been improvements in the communication between the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, we need

to continue to assess and target where the needs of this population are in order to continue to improve outcomes for this population.

HB 5495 would require that DCF and DMHAS report annually to the Mental Health Strategy Board and appropriate legislative committees. This would give entities outside of the Departments an opportunity to get a concrete handle on the status of this critical inter-departmental collaboration, in order to ensure accountability by monitoring appropriate and ongoing progress in the growing area of Young Adult Services.

Currently, Young Adult Services are in place in many, but not all areas of the State. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has limited funding which affects both the statewide reach of Young Adult Services as well as the quality of existing services. I think most people in this room can relate to the critical period in our lives that is Young Adulthood. We needed to weigh many life-altering choices: consider opportunities for school and/or work, leave home, access independent housing, form important social relationships, learn to budget money, etc. Some of life's more important decisions are made during this period of life. The challenge of recovery from a mental illness can make these already daunting decisions much more difficult to navigate and sometimes impossible without support services.

Ongoing investment in Young Adult Services, including input from entities outside of the two Departments, will ensure collaboration in regards to making smoother the transition from DCF to DMHAS. Keep the Promise encourages the committee to pass HB 5495.

Thank you for your time today.