



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION
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April 23, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Governor Ned Lamont - Governor.lamont@ct.gov

Attorney General William Tong - attorney.general@ct.gov

Re: Civil Rights of Patients in State Psychiatric Facilities

Dear Governor Lamont and Attorney General Tong,

We the below undersigned organizations and individuals, join in a call to action across our various disability communities to support the call in the April 18, 2020 letter sent by the Connecticut Legal Rights Project to Governor Lamont and Attorney General Tong for an executive order regarding people currently residing in Connecticut's state-operated inpatient psychiatric facilities.

The people who are patients in Connecticut Valley Hospital, Whiting Forensic Hospital, Capitol Region Mental Health Center, Connecticut Mental Health Center, and Greater Bridgeport Community Health Center are members of our community. The state is responsible for their care and treatment and has both a moral and legal obligation to provide that care in a humane and dignified manner, and in the least restrictive environment. In this time of

COVID-19, treatment in a congregate care setting puts people at increased risk of transmission of the virus.

The state should take action to “decompress” these inpatient psychiatric units so that Connecticut does not experience the preventable tragedies that have occurred in psychiatric facilities in other states and other countries. There are individuals with medical conditions that make them particularly high risk for COVID-19 infection: some have suppressed immune systems, others are already on dialysis for kidney failure. There are elderly and frail patients on many units. Patients in the smaller inpatient facilities in Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport are disproportionately black and brown, and we know that the virus has a disparate impact on people of color. The adverse impacts of psychiatric medications include weight gain and metabolic disruptions that also contribute to worse outcomes.

We urge the Governor to work with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and other state agencies as necessary to ensure that discharges with individualized plans for housing and voluntary support services can happen as expeditiously as possible for those who do not currently meet the legal standards of civil commitment (present danger to self or others, or gravely disabled) and for whom (1) the risk of remaining in a congregate care setting (where physical distancing is difficult to impossible) outweighs the benefits of that level of care, and (2) such discharge does not pose an unreasonable risk to the public.

In addition, coronavirus testing of all patients and staff of any units where there has been a documented confirmed case of COVID-19 must be a top priority. It is clear that temperature screening and monitoring of symptoms is insufficient to prevent the spread of the virus because neither of those methods detect those individuals who are spreading the virus without displaying symptoms.

There are serious long-term concerns with inappropriate institutionalization in these facilities. Important conversations need to be had about this at a later date. But right now we have a public health emergency and we ask that the CLRP call to action be adopted to save lives in this immediate crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for acting on this urgent request.

Respectfully,

Doris Maldonado
Co-Chair
Keep the Promise Coalition

Connecticut Citizen Action Group
Advocacy Unlimited, Inc.
Amplify, Inc.
ACLU-CT
Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut
National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter
Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities
Independent Northwest, Inc.
Connecticut State Independent Living Council
Moving With HOPE, Inc.
NAMI Connecticut
The Hub: Behavioral Health Action Organization for Southwestern CT
Disability Rights Connecticut
Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance
Citizens Coalition For Equal Access