



**For Immediate Release  
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***Mental Health Awareness Month:***

***HOLD UP YOUR HAND Public Awareness Event to Fight Discrimination and Stigma***

This month (May) marks Mental Health Awareness Month across the nation. Child Advocate Jamey Bell, Healthcare Advocate Victoria Veltri, Sara Frankel, Public Policy Director for Children, Youth and Young Adults at the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut, and Greg Williams, Board Member, Connecticut Turning to Youth and Families, announce the **HOLD UP YOUR HAND** mental health public awareness event.

The event will focus on the need to reduce discrimination and stigma attached to having and seeking treatment for mental illness /substance use problems. Consumers and family members will talk about how discrimination impeded their treatment and recovery, and provide strategies for stamping out discrimination and the stigma that it creates. Mr. Williams, a person in long-term recovery who has made a film on the subject of the prevalence of substance use and the integration of people in long term recovery from substance use disorders into our communities, will speak and share the trailer for his film, "The Anonymous People".

"Until we get behind a well designed and ongoing public awareness campaign, and talk about mental illness and substance use as physical conditions, we will continue to see people avoid necessary treatment," Bell said. Veltri states that "we have learned that looking the other way in the face of discrimination only perpetuates it and allows for the sowing of deep seeds of ignorance, fear and injustice." According to Frankel, "It is time to break the silence."

*If you are personally affected by mental health or substance use issues, or know or love someone who is, join us in Holding Up Your Hand at an event where individuals affected by discrimination will raise their voices...*

**WHAT:** HOLD UP YOUR HAND Public Awareness Event to Fight Discrimination and Stigma

**WHEN:** Wednesday, May 22, 2013, 9:30 AM

**WHERE:** State Capitol Hall of Flags

**WHO:** Individuals and family members affected by mental illness and substance use, including Greg Williams, Tanya Burnham and Mark Mahurin. Invited guests include: Governor Dannel P. Malloy, Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman, Senator Toni Harp, Representative Terrie Wood, Senator Don Williams, Representative Brendan Sharkey, Senator John McKinney, Representative Larry Cafero, the state's constitutional officers, state agency officials and the public.

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**About OCA:** OCA speaks out on behalf of Connecticut's children. Through our unique access to information, the OCA investigates concerns about the provision of state funded services and advocates both administratively and legislatively for practice and policy changes to ensure the special rights of children. For assistance, call 1-800-994-0939, or email OCA at [oca@ct.gov](mailto:oca@ct.gov). For general information, visit OCA's website at [www.ct.gov/OCA](http://www.ct.gov/OCA).

**About OHA:** OHA assists consumers with healthcare issues through establishment of effective outreach programs, development of communications related to consumer rights and responsibilities, making informed decisions when selecting a health plan and in resolving problems with their health plans. OHA also identifies and advocates on issues, trends and problems that may require executive, regulatory or legislative intervention. For more information, call 1-866-466-4446, e-mail OHA at [healthcare.advocate@ct.gov](mailto:healthcare.advocate@ct.gov) or visit OHA's website at [www.ct.gov/OHA](http://www.ct.gov/OHA).

**About NAMI Connecticut:** NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. For more information, call 1-800-215-3021 or visit [www.namict.org](http://www.namict.org).

**About Connecticut Turning to Youth and Families:** Connecticut Turning to Youth and Families is a statewide nonprofit organization with a mission to help youth and families facing drug and alcohol problems connect with prevention, treatment and recovery services through a statewide network of peer-to-peer supports. The organization is a unified voice of people who have "been there" working together to strengthen families and communities, improve policies and practices, and, above all, save lives. For more information, call 860-838-3553, send an e-mail to [info@ctyouthandfamilies.org](mailto:info@ctyouthandfamilies.org) or visit [www.ctyouthandfamilies.org](http://www.ctyouthandfamilies.org).

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