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**Public Health Committee Public Hearing
March 3, 2008**

Raised S.B. 498: An Act Authorizing Bonds Of The State For A New Facility In
Manchester For Persons With Developmental Disabilities.

Madam Chair and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Laurie Prytko, I was the Executive Director of MARC, Inc. of Manchester from 1980 – 2006 and currently serve as a member of the MARC Board of Directors and Co-Chair of the MARC Building Committee.

I am here today to ask for your support of Senate Bill 498, “An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State For a Facility in Manchester for Persons with Developmental Disabilities”

I have been involved with MARC since the day it was formed in 1952, my sister Patty, who is no longer with us, had a developmental disability and found comfort and purpose in life because of MARC. My parents and I also found peace and comfort knowing that an organization existed to provide the numerous services Patty would need to give her an opportunity to live as independently as possible. We are forever in debt to MARC and their many wonderful staff over the years.

As MARC matured, so did I. As a teenager, it was a joy and pleasure to have my sister Patty in my life. She loved the world and taught me compassion, kindness, and understanding towards all people.

As a young adult, I was involved with MARC more than ever. The agency was growing by leaps and bounds as more individuals received services. I saw first hand, happy faces of individuals and their families as they experienced a sense of freedom offered by MARC’s many services.

I was so inspired by MARC that I left my job at Pratt & Whitney and became the Executive Director at the Agency in 1980. During this time, I focused on breaking down barriers that existed between people with developmental disabilities and the community. We began to provide community-based employment opportunities by opening a bakery. We expanded the bakery to a second location and the community welcomed us with open arms. People began to notice the talents and skills of a new workforce – people with developmental disabilities. Businesses began calling us to fill their employment needs.

In the early 1990's, The Connecticut General Assembly called upon us to apply our nationally recognized job coach model to welfare to work services in the state.

MARC then expanded to provide retirement, residential and self advocacy services to individuals. People now had the opportunity to live, work and enjoy their communities according to their individual choices.

Even with the success of MARC through out the years, one thing has always been in the back of my mind, and many others who depend on services – the fact that we have always been an orphan in the Town of Manchester. Moving from location to location, lease by lease working in partnership with the Town of Manchester. If there was a basement or vacant school wing we would make the inadequate space somehow work.

In 1999, MARC made its last move into a space located in the basement level of the Manchester Parkade, below the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. This new location provided us much needed space to help more individuals with disabilities and their families. Along with this new growth, and an aging population, our senior center has nearly doubled in size. Additional people means a need for more conference space, file storage space, and staff space for employment and residential services.

On the exterior of the building, the expansion of DCF, and a popular gym, parking and transportation drop off and pickup have increased safety concerns. We also do not have any green space for recreational opportunities for the people supported by MARC.

A new building will solve all of our current issues; allow for expansion, give us green space and provide a permanent solution to Manchester's orphan. I ask that you support S.B. 498 and ask your colleagues to do the same to provide help to others like my sister Patty and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and thank you for the countless hours your devotion to public service to make Connecticut a great state to reside in.