

Sen. Cynthia Stone Creem

Contact: Josh Krintzman (617) 722-1639

April 27, 2007

CREEM TESTIFIES BEFORE PUBLIC SAFETY AND HOMELAND SECURITY  
COMMITTEE

Senator Creem Seeks Mental Health Awareness Training for Law Enforcement

Boston, MA -- Senator Cynthia Stone Creem (D-Newton) testified last week before the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security in support of her bill to create more awareness of mental health issues among police officers. Her testimony focused on Senate Bill 1378, An Act Relative to Training for Law Enforcement in Dealing with Individuals Suffering from Mental Illness.

S.1378 would require an addition to the curriculum for training law enforcement officers. It would mandate training for responding to mental health emergencies and incidents involving people with mental illness and mental retardation, strategies to reduce or prevent harm during confrontations, as well as a basic understanding of legal defenses for persons with mental illness.

The Department of Justice estimates that of the 10 million arrests nationwide each year, over 700,000 involve an individual suffering from mental illness. Many believe that Creem's bill would help ensure the safety of both police officers and individuals suffering from mental illness with whom they come in contact.

"Vulnerable individuals, such as people suffering from mental illnesses and disabilities, present unique challenges to law enforcement officials. That is why we need to give our law enforcement officers the best possible training to fully understand the situations in which they must involve themselves," said Creem. "It is critical that we provide them with the tools needed to make such contacts less confrontational and less violent."

S.1378 has been endorsed by several groups including the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), The Massachusetts Disability Policy Consortium, and The Arc of Massachusetts.