

Testimony of Barbara Miller

**Medicaid Rehabilitative Services Client
Threshold Services, Inc., Silver Spring, Maryland**

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

Regarding

**The Administration's Regulatory Actions on Medicaid: The Effects on
Patients, Doctors, Hospitals, and States**

November 1, 2007

TESTIMONY OF BARBARA MILLER

Chairman Waxman, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning on behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. My name is Barbara Miller.

Today, I am on the road to recovery from a serious mental illness. I am a Program Assistant at the Hearing Loss Association of America. Before starting that job, I did a lot of volunteer work for senior citizens and people with physical disabilities. I am also a deaconess in the Word of Hope Fellowship Church. At the church, I volunteer as Assistant Director for Youth Department. There is a teenage girl in my apartment building who needs a steady, sensible adult influence, and I am trying to provide that to her as a mentor.

But my future didn't always look so bright. I was first diagnosed with bipolar mood disorder in the early 1970's. I lived at the Springfield State Hospital in Sykesville, MD for two and one half years. Chairman Waxman, it was a terrible experience. The doctors there struggled to give me a proper diagnosis – and I've got to tell you the truth: it was like living in a warehouse. That's what happened to most people with serious mental illnesses in the 1960's and 1970's: they were warehoused in state mental hospitals.

However, with the help of treatment, rehabilitation and housing provided by Threshold Services in Montgomery County, MD, I got where I am today. When I first started participating in rehabilitation services in 1990, I received Assertive Community Treatment at a house where I lived with several other people. Staff would come out regularly to check on me, measure progress on my treatment plan, and see how I was responding to medications. They also provided training about living with mental illness to the pastor and his wife who ran the house.

Some time ago, I moved to the Halpine Apartments. It was a huge step for me because it was the first time I lived on my own in many, many years. Threshold Services provided counseling to me during the transition, and offered groups where people could support each other and not become isolated.

Threshold Services runs a residential rehabilitation program and off-site psychiatric rehabilitation teams, which serve a combined total of 250 people. These rehabilitation programs are important because they prepare people with serious and persistent mental disorders to go back to work and cope with life in the community.. Threshold also helps 40 people choose, get and keep jobs where they work side-by-side with non-disabled individuals through their supported employment initiative, in partnership with Saint Luke's House. This is tremendously impressive because the nationwide unemployment rate among people with severe mental illnesses exceeds 80%. Finally, Threshold has a psycho-educational day program that aims to develop community living skills, and improve interpersonal relationships.

With the help of treatment, rehabilitation, and housing provided by Threshold Services, I got from where I was to where I am. And now Threshold Services helps me maintain my success. So now I give back as a member of the Board of Directors. God and the members of the church were with me all the way. It takes a lot of faith in God to persevere. Now I give back as a deaconess and assistant youth director in the church. I was supported by public assistance. Now I give back by working and paying taxes.

Mr. Chairman, I am told by the National Council that almost every service that you've heard me describe during this testimony – Assertive Community Treatment, psychiatric rehabilitation, and psycho-educational day programs – are in jeopardy because of a new rehabilitation option rule.

In addition to medication and therapy, it's worth noting that these rehabilitation services permit people like me to live in the community and make a contribution to the community. If the federal government withdraws financing for them, many more persons with serious mental disorders will end up in emergency rooms, inpatient hospitals, nursing homes or the prison system.

I want to conclude this testimony with a simple plea: please don't send people with mental illnesses back to places like the Springfield State Hospital. We fought too hard.....and we've come too far.....to go back now.