

February 11, 2016

**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony**

**Name: Bonnie Meyers**

Good Evening Chairpersons and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Bonnie Meyers, and I am the Director of Programs & Services at the Brain Injury Alliance of CT. I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS. In his proposal, the Governor seeks to reduce or eliminate funding for important core services of the Department, including funding for the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut. This is very concerning for many reasons, but primarily because at the very foundation and core of this issue is that of human beings, thousands of them throughout the state of CT who desperately depend on your support.

- The Department of Social Services contracts with BIAC to provide services required as part of the Medicaid ABI Waiver program. **The contract with BIAC is used as evidence in several sections of the Waiver application showing that DSS is meeting the obligations of this federal program.** BIAC's responsibilities *according to the ABI Waiver Application submitted to the Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS)* include:
  - Supporting the participant in Service Plan Development and providing information regarding participant direction
  - Disseminating information to the community related to brain injury.
  - Facilitating free monthly support groups throughout Connecticut
  - Statewide toll free support number, providing consultation and resource facilitation for persons who have sustained a brain injury, their families, caregivers and providers
  - Training and community education programs
  - Through BIAC, information about the identification and reporting of abuse, neglect is disseminated to clients, families, and their representatives.

The services and programs that BIAC offers under our contract with DSS are absolutely essential, vital, and necessary for the thousands of brain injury survivors, family members, and professionals who support them. BIAC has a proven history of providing these services at a high level of quality, satisfaction, and at a cost savings to the state.

- **In the amendments to both Waivers which has recently been proposed by DSS, BIAC is the only organization approved to provide advanced training for case managers.**
- **No one else does what BIAC does, including the Department of Social Services (DSS), which is why DSS contracts with BIAC to provide the many essential services that it is not equipped to offer. BIAC meets the needs of the State's brain injury survivors on behalf of DSS as efficiently as it does effectively.**

- BIAC provides all services at a fraction of what it would cost DSS to provide these services.
- BIAC's work on behalf of DSS reduces the brain injury-related workload at DSS.
- BIAC provides critical training and consultation to most of the State key agencies- including DSS, VA, DCF, DPH, DOE, DOC, DMHAS, DDS, and BRS.

I am intimately familiar with the devastating consequences of a brain injury. The impact that a brain injury has on a person's life has been evident to me for my entire adult life. I have worked as a professional in this field for nearly 30 years now, and I have also had the experience of caring for a man with an acquired brain injury throughout 25 years of my life. No person chooses to have a brain injury. In one single second, a life changes – sometimes forever. There is no easy way to adequately convey the devastation that a brain injury can cause on an individual's life and on those that care for them. Simply put, it is life changing. It is truly difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand this unless it happens to you or to someone that you love. Brain injury survivors and their family members often feel lost, isolated, confused, scared, and overwhelmed. Many times, there is no other person to speak with and nowhere else to turn. We touch thousands of people's lives every single year via our DSS contracted services, and these services matter to people. Every single phone call desperately searching for help, for answers, for guidance, and for support and every single person finding their way to one of our support groups needing simply to connect with someone who truly understands – these are just two examples of how we touch lives that matter. Every phone call has a name, and every name has a story. A story that matters, and a story that asks for help. You do have the power, with your vote, to afford these thousands of individuals the help that they so much deserve and need.

In his budget summary, the Governor incorrectly asserts that for years the budget “*automatically funds every activity or line item previously funded, with increases for inflation...*” This is simply not true. BIAC has not received any increase in our contract in over 10 years and actually currently received 13% less than we received in 2008.

- For over 30 years, BIAC has received an operating grant from the Department of Social Services to provide **entirely free** resources and supports which the State is unable to provide.
- If BIAC's contract with DSS would end, **DSS would no longer have the mechanism to provide these essential services required as part of the ABI Medicaid Waiver and needed for compliance with CMS.** BIAC's services only cost the state \$114,460 last year. Despite a staggering increase in calls to BIAC's helpline and requests for assistance from DSS over the past 15 years, BIAC has only seen its contract reduced.

**Despite every effort to control costs and to seek additional sources of funding, it will be increasingly more difficult for BIAC to meet the obligations of our contract, including the mandated requirement for new training, without additional funding. We are seeking the reinstatement of our contract related funding that has been removed through attrition as well as a small amount of additional funding so we can meet our mandated obligations**

**under the requirements of our state contract. Please create a line item for the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut to at least \$150,000.**

I ask with the utmost respect that each and every one of you carefully consider the implications of the proposed budget cuts to the Brain Injury Alliance of CT. What we do and the services that we offer have a direct impact, every single day, on people's lives. Please consider this decision with the utmost deliberation; I implore you to do the right thing. I ask that you consider if you were the person whose life has been altered forever because of a brain injury. How would you vote if this were your spouse or your child or your parent? Please do the right thing for these individuals who very much deserve and need the services that BIAC is able to offer only through our ongoing contract with DSS. It is the right thing to do, and it is the responsible thing to do fiscally and it is the right thing to do for the people of CT.

Thank you for your consideration of this very important matter.

Respectfully,

Bonnie Meyers CRC CBIST