

Testimony Before the Committee on Appropriations

Regarding H.B. 5005:
Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Stephen Tracy
Goshen, Connecticut
February 19, 2020

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and members of the Committee:

My name is Stephen Tracy and I reside in Goshen, Connecticut. I am the father of three adult children – the eldest of whom has been severely disabled since birth. For the past thirty years, Christopher has resided in a New Milford group home managed by Ability Beyond, one of several non-profit organizations that enable the state of Connecticut to meet its obligations to thousands of its most deserving citizens. It has been my privilege to serve on the organization’s Board of Directors since the early 1990s.

I am here today to encourage you to be as forthcoming as possible as you determine appropriation levels for the Department of Disability Services and the Department of Social Services with respect to services for Connecticut’s disabled citizens.

Ability Beyond, formerly known as DATAHR, was founded over sixty years ago by a group of parents who were seeking quality care for their handicapped children. The organization has grown to serve some 3,000 disabled men and women in Connecticut and New York. We are the largest provider of Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) services in the state, serving 117 program participants in twenty facilities. Because Ability

Beyond was founded by parents and because parents remain active in the governance and oversight of its programs, the organization enjoys a remarkable degree of support among the families that it serves.

But I have to tell you – we have really been feeling the squeeze over the past few years. We have faced rising acuity levels among our clients, along with increased costs for insurance and workers compensation. At the same time (except for pass throughs for new costs and wages), since 2008 Connecticut has actually reduced our ICF rates. We have managed to hold our cost increases to just 4% over those years -- but these increases, together with declining state support, simply cannot be sustained. Bottom line: our ICF losses have grown from \$440,000 in 2017 to over 1.1 million in 2019.

For years, Connecticut has woefully underfunded the non-profit organizations that serve our state's disabled population with rates considerably below those at which it funds programs operated by government agencies. This makes no sense, either for the disability community or the taxpayer. When you have non-profits that deliver quality service at a significantly lower cost, you should be looking to support and grow them - not starve them out of business. Because if that happens, the state will face a stark dilemma: either accommodate our loved ones in more expensive state-run programs, or place more and more of our disabled citizens on waiting lists rather than providing them with the care that they deserve.

I encourage the General Assembly to commit to equity in the funding of ICF services and other programs for the disabled by funding non-profit organizations at levels comparable to those afforded to state-run programs.

Thank you.