



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing - March 7, 2020
H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

The true measure of any society can
be found in how it treats its most
vulnerable members

— Mahatma Gandhi —

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Governor's budget proposal.

I am Alyssa Goduti, the President and CEO of Adelbrook Behavioral and Developmental Services. Adelbrook is a multi-service agency specializing in Autism Spectrum Disorders, developmental services, and behavioral health treatment. We contract with the Department of Children and Families, Department of Developmental Services, local municipalities and school systems, and receive Medicaid funding for our residential programs through the Department of Social Services. We support approximately 350 youth with highly complex developmental and behavioral needs and their families. We provide an array of educational, residential, and community-based services, including residential treatment, therapeutic group homes, community living arrangements and continuous residential support homes. In addition we run 5 special education schools. We run a store-front business called the Bark-ery in Middletown (our bakery for dogs) where our students learn vital employment skills. We have programs at our main campus in Cromwell, in Middletown, East Hartford, Manchester, Portland, Berlin, Bristol, Cheshire, New Britain, Southington and Meriden. Our students and residents come to us from every community in the state.

We provide highly specialized services including evaluation and assessment; stabilization, treatment and transition services. Currently 1:59 children born are diagnosed with Autism and the need for our services has grown exponentially. Many of the children we serve have extensive trauma histories, experienced multiple hospitalizations and have been in other treatment programs, often out-of-state. Our programs keep children out of hospitals and help get them back into the community. We work to understand and address behaviors, help individuals to develop and improve communication skills, identify and maximize their unique talents, and ultimately help them find hope and happiness.

We are also a very large employer in Central CT, supporting 675 employees (three shifts of staff/residential programs) in our 20 locations across central CT. Our success is dependent on our talented, committed and compassionate staff. They work to build relationships, establish trust and provide the most individualized care in every aspect of our children's lives. We do this work not only to fulfill our mission of helping people find hope and healing but also in partnership with and on behalf of the state of CT. Our work in caring for people in need is rightfully a core function and obligation of government.

However, we are now at 14 years of essentially no cost of living increase from our state funders. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461M in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation. As a business and a large employer, it is unreasonable to expect us to continue to provide the same level of service, meet complex and increasing regulatory requirements, and address growing demands for services at reimbursement rates that don't come close to meeting our costs. Costs for health insurance, utilities, rent and other business expenses have increased steadily but our state reimbursement levels have remained flat.

With projected surpluses and looming state retirements, this is the time for state government to invest in the community-based nonprofit human services system so that we continue to be part of the solution for children, families and government. Our 675 employees and their peers across the state deserve to be paid at a rate that reflects their expertise and dedication and to have a system that provides consistent funding increases to meet the cost of inflation. The children we serve deserve to have consistent staffing, with limited impact of turnover. The state needs a stable system to turn to when thousands of state employees access retirement and human services will have to be shifted to the nonprofit system.

I ask that you commit to increasing funding by \$461M by fiscal 2025. For 2021 we request a \$128M appropriation (a state net of \$67M after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits. I ask that you plan for consistent funding increases that are indexed to inflation so that we may continue to meet growing needs and respect our incredible staff with wages that reflect the challenging work they do.

I also urge you to reject the Governor's proposal to cut \$5.4M from the Board and Care for Children – Short-term and residential. This line funds crucial programs that provide at-risk children who are removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect or other high-risk circumstances a safe, stabilizing experience. Our caring and highly-trained staff support these children in home-like therapeutic settings. If we do not safeguard children's services from budget cuts, we jeopardize the tremendous gains the state has made over the last three decades. This is the time to protect our most vulnerable kids and enhance services for those with significant needs.

Please remember that we are part of the budget solution. Now is the time to invest in the nonprofit human service infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and attention.