

Appropriations Committee Hearing Testimony
Friday, February 21, 2020
Shanna York
Residential Program Worker | Oak Hill

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Shanna York and I am a Residential Program Worker, also known as a Direct Support Professional, for Oak Hill. Recently I came across testimonies from 1992 pertaining to budgets and nonprofit pleas for increased funding. These testimonies are all still applicable today and I could sit here and read any one of them to you and the information would still, for the most part, be relevant now in 2020. I was 12 years old in 1992. I am going to be 40 this year. This legislature, and every single legislature that was comprised prior to this one, has miserably failed community nonprofits for the past 28 years. If that is not a clear testament as an example of completely disgusting, I do not know what is. The fact that I have to sit here right now fighting for the same exact thing that my predecessors fought for almost 30 years in the making is ridiculous.

I have been a Residential Program Worker with Oak Hill for almost 19 years. I love my job. There is nothing else that I would rather be doing. But I would be lying if I said that these 19 years have not taken their toll on me. We are chronically underfunded. Program participants are losing the places that they call their homes. Services are being cut all the time despite the fact that there is a greater need for them. We are chronically understaffed. Community nonprofits simply cannot compete when it comes to wages. Week after week the effects of short staffing wear on us. We are getting tired. We are getting burned out. And to be perfectly honest and blunt, we are sick and tired of hearing placating praise for the work that we do and empty sentiments of agreement with our pleas.

Furthermore, it makes me incredibly angry that after all these years and after all the people who came before me, that I have to take time off from my job, leaving my shift to be covered by someone else, to come down here and sit before you to fight for something that you should be so willing to do in the first place. People are what is at stake when programs close. Programs close because you do not fund them. People are what is at stake when services are cut. Services are cut because you do not fund them. Staffing shortages create unsafe and stressful work environments. We are short staffed because you do not fund for competitive wages. So, when a parent stares me down asking why Oak Hill's services are diminishing or why their child's home is closing, or why I look so exhausted, I will blame you. The time has come for you to start rectifying the wrongs that you have so willingly perpetrated on community nonprofits for years, helping in part to create this enormous budget surplus that the state now has. Do not tell us that the work that we do is noble. Do not tell us that you appreciate us for the work that we do. **Fund** us.