

Appropriations Committee Testimony

Public Hearing on:

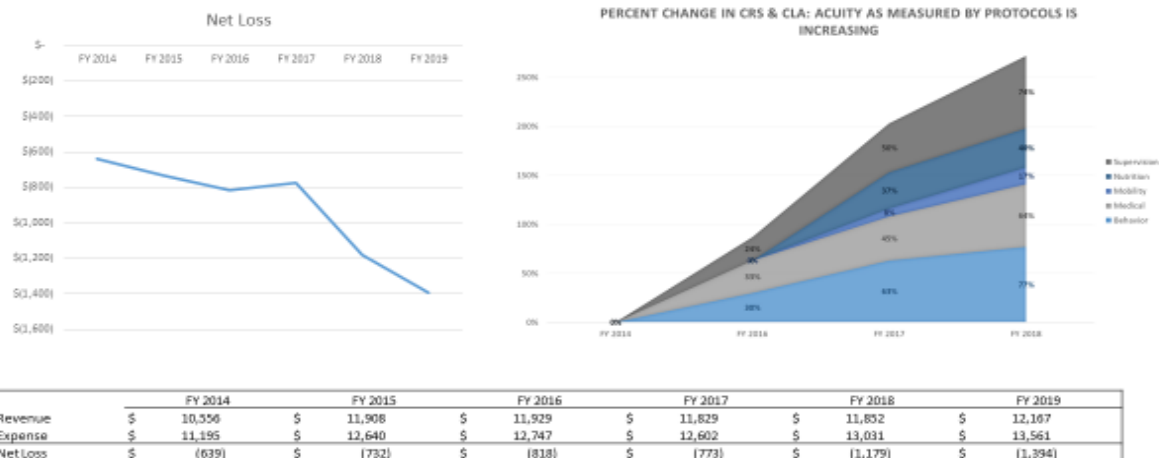
H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Amy Brown, and I am the Controller of Ability Beyond, a private, non-profit provider of community services for people with disabilities. We serve 3,000 people every year, and our funders include DSS, DDS and DMHAS. Our services span across most of Western Connecticut, and our community includes 1,000 employees, 320 community employers, and over 2,000 family members.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

Today I am speaking on behalf of the nearly 400 people with developmental disabilities we serve in community based homes (CLAs and CRSs), individualized home supports; day, work and employment settings. Over past 2 decades funding for services has at best remained flat, and in most cases has been reduced due to changes in funding mechanism. By way of example, the minimum wage has increased 103% from \$7.25/hr. in 2007 to \$14.75/hr. legislated increase January 1, 2019, yet fees paid by DDS have increased by less than 6% in aggregate for the same time period, resulting in losses for Ability Beyond of \$1,400,000 last year. The funding provided by DDS is mostly based on Levels of Need assigned to each individual served. In some cases we are receiving funding below the Level of Need rate established by the Department and we have requested relief from the Department. At the same time, the people we serve have increased needs related to aging, and other acuity factors. These two phenomenon together have intensified to the point where we are operating at a loss severe enough to put the closure of these important programs under consideration. (Please see below chart showing decreased funding and acuity).



Beyond the existing losses, some of these services are facing implementation of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) in January, 2021. I participate in the workgroup of providers supporting DDS on this EVV implementation. As our agency has experience with the EVV process from other funding sources, I have shared our outcomes with the workgroup. The EVV process creates duplication of effort for our direct care staff and causes significant administrative burden in reconciling multiple recordkeeping systems. Based on the administrative impact from our prior experience, I am projecting an increased cost to our agency of \$150,000 in order to implement EVV for DDS funded services. We have begun discussions with the Department to request funding for this cost, but there has been no guarantee. In addition, our experience with EVV resulted in nearly ½ million dollar delay in payments from the State for a period of nearly 2 years. This is just another example of unfunded mandates imposed over the past several years.

While there are limited funds for emergency situations, we need to receive funds for day to day needs. We need legislative support. We need your help to continue our programs for Connecticut's most fragile citizens. The alternative will be far more costly to the people we serve and the residents who pay taxes in this State.

Along with providers and families from around the state, I respectfully **request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits**. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years.

Please:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2025;
2. Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2021, a 7% increase;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.
4. Give private providers of DDS services, which are vital, community based services caring for Connecticut's most needy, adequate rates to stay open. These programs desperately need your attention immediately.

Thank you.