

**Appropriations Committee Health Subcommittee
Public Hearing
Friday, February 21, 2020**

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

My name is Kellie Lussier. I am a Support Coach at Horizons -- a private nonprofit agency in South Windham in operation since 1979 providing individualized services for people with special needs where they live, learn, work, and play.

I wish to comment on H.B. 5005 concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

Nonprofits are dependent on the State for funding and have limited options in the face of budget shortfalls. They can't raise taxes or charges. Horizons' services have grown dramatically over the past 41 years in order to address the changing needs of Connecticut's citizens with intellectual disabilities.

Private Providers like Horizons are the major work force in delivering essential services for DDS.

Our agency staff along with those of other nonprofits are the ones supporting 90% of **all** people in Supported Living and group homes. They cannot "call out" in a snow storm or other bad weather.

Our staff along with others like us are the ones job-coaching 92% of the people in Employment and Day services through DDS. Horizons staff like me are part of Connecticut's economic engine, working to support people with developmental disabilities in their jobs in the eastern half of the state: at the Coast Guard Academy, Groton Sub Base, UCONN, Eastern CT State University and Mystic Aquarium, as well as dozens of restaurants, supermarkets, coffee shops, nurseries, retail stores, nursing homes and other small businesses from Tolland to New London.

Our Staff provide **ESSENTIAL** services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We need to be included in the group of essential service providers that receive automatic COLA increases annually. **If not now , when?**

Horizons invests over 100 hours of training in each of its employees. I am trained in medication administration, HIPPA compliance, Person Centered program development, Abuse and Neglect Prevention and First Aid/CPR – to name a few from a long list. My colleagues and I are valuable professionals. The value of our work demands that we receive the proper level of compensation.

As you know, more than half of the state budget comprises "fixed costs" which are not subject to cuts. That percentage grows each year.

There is an irreplaceable role for DDS in performing licensing and quality assurance. But let the private sector deliver the high quality services. Community nonprofits like Horizons make it possible to lower overall state costs while meeting the growing demand for these essential services. The state needs to compensate these essential nonprofit staff appropriately.

Thank You.
Kellie Lussier