

Appropriations Committee Health Subcommittee Public Hearing
Friday, February 21, 2020
H.B.#5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE 30, 2021

Testimony of Janice Chamberlain, Director of Human Resources,
Horizons Programs, Inc., South Windham, CT.

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Janice Chamberlain. I am the Director of Human Resources for Horizons a private nonprofit organization in operation for 41 years providing individualized services for people with developmental disabilities where they live, learn, work, and play.

My comments tonight address HB #5005 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

I started my career as a direct support professional in the late 70's. I understand the work and training required of a direct support professional to be able to do an extraordinary job with compassion and skill. Now, as a Director of Human Resources, I continue to be passionate about the quality of the services we provide for our Connecticut constituents with developmental disabilities. I am passionate about finding quality job applicants for our direct support positions. I am also very passionate about paying our employees an adequate living wage that keeps up with inflation as they begin on a career path with our company. Working for a quality nonprofit agency has been my chosen career path and should be a viable option for young professionals graduating in 2020, 2021 and beyond.

Thirty (30) years ago when I started at Horizons, I had visited the LOB on several occasions to advocate for dollars to improve the wages of our direct support professionals and operating budgets for nonprofits. From 1987 to 2001 our salary and operating budget increases lagged behind the Consumer Price Index(CPI) for that same period. The CPI increased 60.39% over this 14-year period. Our operating budgets and wages grew only 20.51%.

The trend of underfunding community nonprofit organizations has continued and the gap has grown even larger after 2001. From 2007 to 2019 (13-year period) state funding shortfalls mean community nonprofits have fallen \$461 million behind the cost of services.

Yes, the underfunding of our budgets has continued for over three decades.

Thank you to this Legislative body for infusing the DDS budget in 2018 with the dollars to give our agency the ability to increase our starting wage to \$14.75 in January of 2019. We also were able to pass on a 5% increase to the rest of our direct support professionals. This was a glimmer of hope for this Director of Human Resources and I finally felt we could remain somewhat competitive in a shrinking pool of qualified applicants. This action and commitment by all of you was greatly appreciated, however, without an inflationary index of some sort built

into this plan for our 2020 budget and future years, we have already experienced a slide backward in our ability to recruit and retain competent, talented workers as our wages stagnate and cost of benefits increase. The qualified work force we are competing for have job options in both the private and public sector. Despite constant advertising and hiring, positions remain open and our turnover rate continues to be high at 24.5%.

The change in the minimum wage law was necessary however this will also adversely impact our hiring needs as the minimum wage increases and comes closer to our starting wage.

Non-profit community-based providers are essential partners with the State. The supports and services provided by our organization and others like us are vital to the well-being of Connecticut's constituents and essential to building sustainable, vibrant communities. Protecting and supporting the funding of these organizations and businesses is a solid investment in Connecticut's vitality.

I do appreciate the hard decisions the Appropriations Committee and Legislature will have to make in the next several months. Please continue to support and invest in community nonprofits like Horizons. Thank you.