



**TESTIMONY OF
TRACEY WALKER
TO
THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
ON**

H.B. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

Thank you to Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee for this opportunity to provide written testimony on H. B. 5005 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

I am Tracey Walker, CEO of Journey Found a nonprofit agency providing supports and services to adults with intellectual disabilities throughout north central and southeastern Connecticut. Specifically, Journey Found offers homes and other supports in the communities of Mansfield/Storrs, Manchester, Vernon, South Windsor, Windsor, West Hartford, Broad Brook, Plainville, Southington/Plantsville, Groton, Mystic, Niantic, Pawcatuck/Stonington and Norwich. Journey Found serves 84 people mostly in small group home settings and employs 289 people.

I am respectfully asking that \$461 million be appropriated for community nonprofits over the next five (5) years. Since 2007, community nonprofit contracts have not kept pace with inflation thereby creating a situation where the contracts no longer cover the cost of doing business while the demands for these services have increased. The funding awarded for wages in provider agencies funded through DDS last year was much needed and greatly appreciated. However, this all went to wages and related benefits for low wage employees and did not assist in covering the other increased costs of doing business.

Specifically, the \$461 million represents a 28% increase by FY 2025 with a 7% increase of \$128 million in FY 2021 and lesser increases in each of the subsequent years. This represents a net increase for the state of \$67 million after federal reimbursement net fiscal year. Additionally, community nonprofit rates should be indexed to inflation to provide adequate increases moving forward to end the perpetual underfunding that has existed for decades.

The current contractual situation has impacted Journey Found's ability to fulfill our mission of enabling each person served to be all they are capable of being. As we need to shift resources, both from state contracts and fundraising, to pay the cost of home ownership (we own ten of our group homes) and the provision of residential care: maintenance, utilities, transportation of people served, food, household supplies; we have less to enhance the lives of those living in our programs. There is less left at the end of the day to help them participate fully in their chosen activities and the things that help fulfill us all.

We have not had to close a program.....yet. But we have had to turn people away who have wanted us to be the agency to provide them or their loved one services because we could not do

so for the funding available. Each month we receive calls from anxious families hoping we can provide them with supports and often we have to tell them we can't as there is either not enough in their loved one's allocated budget or because we cannot afford to develop the new service requested.

Without increased funding, the day will soon be here when we will need to start closing programs. This proposes more than the huge disruption and crisis this would represent for the three- four people living in one of our homes. It represents job loss to the staff who have cared for them, sometimes for many years, as well as a loss to the community. Our homes are fully integrated in their local communities and we consume goods and services locally. In total, we reinvest at least \$1 million a year in local vendors, shops, and services.

Specific to the DDS portion of the Governor's budget, there are two items that I ask you to consider as they also support the DDS funded nonprofit provider community. 1) Please support the Governor's proposal to create an incentive payment model to help move people to less intensive and more appropriate levels of care and 2) please oppose the Governor's proposal to cut from the Behavioral Support Program. The latter reflects "attrition" but the funds could be reinvested toward rate increases rather than being cut.

In closing, it is critical to the quality of life in Connecticut that our community nonprofit service delivery system be not only preserved but bolstered. The human and economic costs of not providing this support are too high to ignore this inequity further.

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