



## Appropriations Committee Testimony

### Public Hearing on:

### [H.B. 5005](#) An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Good evening distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony supporting H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

I am Denise Henry, the Executive Director for SARAH Inc. Our agency delivers Birth to Three services and supports for adults with intellectual disabilities to more than 1400 people annually in 31 towns across 4 counties. We are able to do this work thanks to our 120 employees that live and work in your communities.

Our organization has been in existence for over 60 years but our ability to deliver vital services is threatened by years of underfunding. As a result we have eliminated positions and closed program locations. The work didn't go away with the positions. Instead we had to give our dedicated employees more to do. Closing program sites meant leaving towns where the people we support and our employees were valued members of the community.

At some point even a business as well run as SARAH Inc. has nowhere else to streamline expenses. Let me emphasize, we are a very well run business, delivering quality supports while always looking for operational efficiencies. However continually rising costs without rate increases for more than a decade has negatively impacted our ability to deliver services. It has meant we are unable to support adults with the most complex needs, or those living in sparsely populated, rural areas. This includes individuals living with their very elderly parents. Parents I am sure you can understand that are overwhelmed by the changing needs of their aging son or daughter.

It has also meant that it is a challenge to recruit and retain the staff that a SARAH Inc. must have to exist. These are not minimum wage jobs yet with the rising minimum wage in Connecticut they soon will be. Our staff are highly trained and are working with people that have a wide range of support needs. How can this play out? Staff supports for a new graduate to get and keep a competitive job, or to help someone find a volunteer opportunity that increases their self-esteem and confidence. It can even be a matter of life and death such as staff recognizing the person they are supporting has a severe allergic reaction and administers an epi-pen. This last example recently happened at one of our employment sites. Thanks to our staff's training and quick thinking the person is fine. Without an increase in funding how can we find and keep the employees we so desperately need?

That is why I am here to wholeheartedly ask you to appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits. Over the past 13 years we have lost at least that much in state funding because service rates have not kept pace with inflation or covered increased costs and demand for services.

Please:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million by FY 2025;
2. Appropriate \$128 million in new funding for community nonprofits in FY 2021 which is a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement.

And to truly address the nonprofit business funding crisis:

3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

I know you all value the work of community providers. We support your family, friends, neighbors and constituents. We do this work in partnership with state government for and with the people of Connecticut. But this partnership is strained. Please be a strong partner and support this bill so we can continue our work together for the people in this great State.

Thank you for listening.

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