

Testimony Before the Committee on Appropriations

Regarding H.B. 5005:
Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Stephen Tracy
Goshen, Connecticut
February 21, 2020

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

My name is Stephen Tracy and I reside in Goshen, Connecticut. I am here today on behalf of my eldest son who has been severely disabled since his birth. For the past thirty years, Christopher has had the good fortune to reside in a New Milford group home managed by Ability Beyond, one of many fine non-profit organizations that enable the state of Connecticut to meet its obligations to thousands of its most deserving citizens. It has been my privilege to serve on the organization's Board of Directors for most of that time.

For too many years, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, Connecticut has woefully underfunded the non-profit organizations that serve our state's disabled population with rates considerably below those at which it funds programs operated by government agencies. This makes no sense, either for the disability community or the taxpayer. When you have non-profits that deliver quality services at a significantly lower cost, you should be looking to support and grow them - not starve them out of business. Because if that happens, the state will face a stark dilemma: either accommodate our

loved ones in more expensive state-run programs, or stand idly by as more and more of our disabled citizens languish on waiting lists rather than receiving the care that they deserve.

I am here today to encourage you to be as forthcoming as possible as you determine appropriation levels for the Department of Developmental Services. I ask also that you commit to equity in the funding of services the disabled by funding non-profit organizations at levels comparable to those afforded to state-run programs.

Ability Beyond, formerly known as DATAHR, was founded over sixty years ago by a group of parents who were seeking quality care for their handicapped children. The organization has grown to serve some 3,000 disabled men and women in Connecticut and New York. Because Ability Beyond was founded by parents and because family members play an active role in the organization's governance, it enjoys a remarkable degree of support among the families that it serves.

But I have to tell you – we have really been feeling the squeeze over the past few years. We have faced rising acuity levels among our clients, along with increased costs for insurance and workers compensation. Despite our efforts to control costs and raise money on our own, the rates authorized by the state are simply not allowing us to keep up. In fact, we expect our losses across all of our DDS program will total about \$850,000 this year alone. We cannot continue to operate this way – and so we are here today to ask for your help.

Thank you.