

Public Hearing H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2021

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

I am unable to attend the Public Hearing H.B. 5005 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2021 on Friday 2/21/2020, however; I would like to submit written testimony. I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Community Non-profits provide essential services to needy individuals in every CT town. Non-profits are major employers in the state and sustain a work force in the tens of thousands. CT non-profits supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities have endured decades without substantial COLA's and years of budget cuts. These cuts have caused non-profits to shutter services, restrict expansion, cut costs, cut personnel, and pass on costs of rising health care to employees. Increases in liability and workers' compensation insurance have pulled resources away from serving individuals in need.

Lack of COLA's and budget reductions have stagnated wages of direct support workers to a critical point. Even with the generous wage increase last FY, rising minimum wages will leave critically necessary direct care workers earning minimum wage. It will be impossible to recruit, train, and retain qualified, caring, and committed staff to care for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Why invest the energy to care for the very lives and well-being of people when you can earn the same minimum wage at a convenience store? We have already experienced a 100% increase in turnover and massive shortage of direct care staffing.

As a Program RN covering four group homes, I have seen numerous employees leaving the field due to insufficient compensation. Most Direct Support Personnel are working multiple jobs to make ends meet – and are finding it tough to do so. I know myself, as an RN, would be able to earn more in another position as well. Most of us who stay in this field do so out of commitment to helping to ensure a positive quality of life for the individuals whom we serve.

I am respectfully requesting that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over 5 years for community non-profits. Non-profits have lost at least that much in the last decade or more as funding has not kept pace with inflation and rising costs of care.

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2025;
2. Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2021, a 7% increase;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

Without a significant influx of resources into the community non-profit system there will be even more dangerously short staffing scenarios, massive vacant positions, and a critically fragile support system at its breaking point.

Respectfully,

Brenda Grogan, BSN, RN
Community Residences, Inc. – Program RN