

TESTIMONY OF TOM FIORENTINO BEFORE THE  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE on HB 5005

My name is Tom Fiorentino. I live in West Hartford with my wife Shelagh McClure and our 29 year old son, Dan. Dan has an intellectual disability. I am also a board member and immediate past president of the Arc of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my consternation at the portions of HB 5005 that actually cut already underfunded services for people, like Dan, who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD.)

For many years, I have come before your committee- as well as other committees, working groups, and task forces- in the hope that at some point Connecticut would meet its oft-stated commitment to people with I/DD.

And for years I have heard two things: the first is a heartening and bi-partisan commitment and acknowledgement that providing for the health and welfare of people with I/DD is a core government function. The second, which has a tendency to negate the first, is that because of fiscal constraints, the State is unable to fulfill that commitment.

I will not bore with you the long litany of new approaches to services -time-tested and used extensively in more progressive states- approaches that would have expanded services without adding a dollar to the budget- that were categorically rejected by the past administration for reasons that pass neither moral or fiscal muster.

So as a result of systematic and disproportionate cuts, what has happened over the past few years, is the shredding of the safety social net painstakingly constructed by so many of you, your predecessors and I/DD advocates.

The result is many key non-profit providers- despite draconian economies that have never been contemplated much less implemented in the public sector- are fiscally unstable. And a direct result of that is those people in our community with the greatest needs- those with complex medical and behavioral problems along with I/DD- are sometimes finding impossible to obtain services.

That recent history is what makes the proposed cuts contained in HB 5005 so hard to take, and frankly to stomach.

It's as if, after years of telling a family member for whom you have assumed responsibility- and telling everyone else you know- that you wish you could do more but you just can't because you just don't have money- after years of telling everyone that taking care of that person is one of the most important things you can do; after all that- when you finally find you have the money to begin to give the support that you should- the support that you told everyone you wanted to give- at that point you not only don't give them any more money, but you actually tell them that your going to have to reduce the amount you already promised.

So not only do I oppose the cuts in HB 5005, I want to urge you to finally- now that your fiscal situation permits it- to honor the commitments you have made, and begin the expansion of services so desperately needed by so many.

For years we have heard that you would act if only you could. But that fiscal reality prevented that action.

While yesterday's failure to honor an acknowledged commitment could at least be plausibly attributed to bleak finances- to the new economic reality- today's failure cannot.

Accordingly, a failure to expand funding today isn't a decision compelled by finances. Instead, it's a choice. And a de facto disavowal of the oft-stated acknowledgement that providing for the most vulnerable among us is a core government function.

You have a thankless job. But one thing your thankless job affords you is a chance- every so often- to change lives for the better on a scale that is simply unimaginable for the rest of us.

This is one of those times. You now have the resources to honor the commitments that I believe you made in good faith. Will you?