

February 21, 2020

Appropriations Committee Testimony
David Hadden
Board Chair, Oak Hill

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is David Hadden and I am the Board Chair of Oak Hill, also known as Connecticut Institute for The Blind. Each year, Oak Hill serves over 40,000 people with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health needs. Our services include residential, employment, special education, recreation, adaptive sports and fitness, and assistive technology.

I also have the honor of being the father of Jamie Hadden and Sam Hadden. For reasons random and inexplicable to this day, other than the grand lottery of life to which we are all subject, each of our sons was blind, non-ambulatory and never developed speech. While vibrant characters, they needed assistance in all aspects of daily living. And with their distinct personalities and unique energy they touched lives and opened hearts wherever they traveled throughout our community. My wife and I attended to their daily needs for 35 years, with the essential help of Oak Hill and HARC.

In the lottery of life, Jamie and Sam could be your brothers or children or grandchildren. You in the General Assembly have recognized again and again that the State is fundamentally responsible for the safety net for essential services for those who need some help from all of us. We who find ourselves on the receiving end of lifesaving services are profoundly grateful.

And the fact is that Oak Hill and the nonprofit sector are your partners in discharging this fundamental responsibility. Oak Hill nimbly serves a broad spectrum of participants ranging from those who require only a light touch to live independently to those like Jamie and Sam with pervasive and complex needs. The nonprofit sector has demonstrated again and again that we provide essential services far more cost-effectively than can the State itself.

Oak Hill employs over 1,700 professionals in 73 towns to make this possible. The vast majority of our employees are hardworking dedicated union members.

But nonprofit providers face **two fundamental problems** for which we need your help. **The first is inadequate funding:**

- Providers have not had a general funding increase in 13 years. In some of those years, there were cuts.
- Over those 13 years, the loss to Connecticut providers was \$462 million.
- Over the same period, the Bureau of Economic Analysis gross domestic price index grew by 28%.

No rational business performs its best work in that environment. The inevitable outcome is service reduction and staff turnover. **We urge this Committee to recommend appropriation of \$67 million in new dollars in FY 2021 for community nonprofits, a 7% increase, and adopt a plan to fully fund services with \$334 million over the next five years.**

The second fundamental problem consists of unnecessary structural conditions inhibiting our work. One obvious solution is to **clarify statutes to protect charitable property tax exemptions.** Nonprofits are doing the work of the State. It makes no sense that they have to pay scarce resources to local municipalities that could be used for programmatic purposes. A second obvious solution is to **incentivize nonprofits toward greater efficiency and flexibility by allowing them to retain savings achieved through program innovations.**

Connecticut can and should be a national leader in crafting a modern, efficient and sustainable human service delivery system.

On behalf of Oak Hill, and on behalf of my family, thank you for your consideration and for your service.