



CONNECTICUT RENAISSANCE

Reclaim your life

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Date: February 26, 2021

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Kathleen Deschenes, CEO of CT Renaissance

RE: [H.B. 6439](#) An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor
Judicial & Corrections Budgets

Good evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Kathleen Deschenes and I am the CEO for CT Renaissance. We are a human service organization that provides mental health, addiction and criminal justice services throughout New Haven and Fairfield counties. Every year, we serve over 3,000 adults, adolescents and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor. We respectfully **request that the legislature increase funding by \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits.**

Since 1967, CT Renaissance has provided services funded through the Department of Corrections, (DOC); the Court Support Services Division, (CSSD), the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, (DMHAS) and Federal Probation.

Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. As the cost of providing services has risen disproportionately to the level of funding our organization receives, it has been incumbent upon us to fundraise to make up the difference. However, the gap has grown too large for nonprofits to meet. Because of that, we have made reductions in staff and other expenses wherever possible. There are no further cuts that can be made without compromising our services, our clients' needs and the general safety of our programs.

We urge you to please consider the following recommendations:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026;

2. Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2022, a 7% increase;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.
4. Hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the impact of inadequate funding for nonprofit services and brought unanticipated and unbudgeted costs and operational challenges for many community nonprofits, such as:

- Procuring expensive and hard to find Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies;
- Providing hazard pay for essential workers on the front lines with a higher risk of exposure;
- Creating telehealth services seemingly overnight, and purchasing necessary computers, cybersecurity, online meeting platforms and training for both staff and people receiving services.
- CT Renaissance never closed our doors even as the pandemic worsened.

Within our DOC contract, we operate three Work Release Programs that serve 170 men at any given time. The staff that work in these programs earn anywhere from \$13.74 - \$15/hr. They provide case management services, assist clients to interview for and find jobs, monitor the intake of medication, and act as liaisons to primary care doctors, mental health and addiction therapists, and prescribers.

As there is a high incidence of opioid use among this population, our staff are armed with Narcan in order to revive an individual who has overdosed on heroin. There have been many incidents of heroin overdoses. Our staff may find an individual unconscious with difficulty breathing, a pale or bluish color and an erratic heartbeat. Imaging taking on the responsibility to administer a medication hoping to bring a man back to life? It is a daunting responsibility.

Usually, after an incident, our staff experience trauma knowing that if they weren't in the right place at the right time, one of their clients may have died. So for an average of \$14/hr, one can choose to do this type of work or one can be a cashier at Home Depot or a barista at Starbucks. Our staff need to be paid a competitive wage for the level of responsibility they assume at CT Renaissance and all nonprofits.

Within our current DOC contract for Work Release Programs, we are given funding to provide three meals per day for our clients. The current funding allows us to budget for \$4.65 per day to feed each client three meals per day. You can purchase a large flavored coffee at Starbucks for about the same price. So, we solicit food donations from grocery stores, Costco, the Food banks and our food vendor; always looking to connect to organizations that can supplement our food supply.

The nonprofit sector cares deeply about the people we serve and we work tirelessly to meet their needs. We sacrifice. Our staff go without pay increases for years and have had their benefits cut. We are savvy, frugal, creative and determined...we do not give up. Now we are asking you not to give up on us. We provide services for the neediest people in our CT communities. Without us, these individuals would be homeless, hospitalized or incarcerated costing the taxpayer much more than it costs to be served within our organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this evening and thank you for your consideration of our request.

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