

*Hello Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee.*

*My name is Ann Arpino, I have been serving as a volunteer on the Board of Directors at **Marrakech, Inc.** since 2014 and Treasurer since 2020.*

*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.*

*I am proud to serve on the Board at Marrakech, Inc. Since I have joined the Board I noticed that year after year that the State has not provided us a Cost of Living Increase. That is no increase for our services we provide. Last week we had our quality meeting with DDS and, although we receive glowing reports from all three regions we operate in, there is no money connected with this performance and has not been for 14 years. This directly impacts our staff, the people we support and their families negatively.*

*I am always amazed by the commitment of our Marrakech employees, despite the fact that they have no increase to look forward to. That is no way to run a business, especially when you have over 715 employees.*

*In 2019, Connecticut put aside a significant amount of money to show our staff supporting people with developmental disabilities that they are not minimum wage workers. You ensured their wages were 46% more than minimum wage workers. Well this has been dwindling year after year and in just 5 months, if you do not commit to this ask, we are being **allocated by you** to pay our critically essential staff, just 13% more than minimum wage workers, who are also promised increases each year, **allocated by you.***

*We remained open during COVID, although we did not qualify for PPP money because of our size. 56% of our employees changed their job duties, work shifts, work sites and some actually packed their bags, left their families and moved into our congregate living sites so that we were able to successfully reduce the amount of human to human contact and successfully stopped the spread of COVID in these sites within 13 days of our first positive case, for both the people we support and our staff.*

*I see that the Governor's proposed budget does not grant an increase for the human service nonprofits, and I also see that the budget contains 200 part time positions to be hired by DDS at approximately 23.00 per hour. These proposals alone put us in an extremely undesirable and unsustainable position.*

*I appreciate the co-chairs public support of funding the nonprofits fairly to make up for the 14 years of no COLA, and to commit to funding increases on a regular basis. I hope that this is supported by everyone on the appropriations and every legislator in CT.*

*I respectfully request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits. 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.*

**Please:**

- 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.*

*Thank you for your anticipated support of Marrakech employees, who in turn support a vulnerable segment of CT'S population as well as their families.*

*Sincerely,  
Ann Arpino  
Treasurer, Marrakech Inc.*