

Public Hearing on

H.B. 6439 – AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Appropriations Committee

March 2, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Miner, Representative Walker and Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Collette Bement and I am the mother of 34-year old young man, Scott, who has intellectual and developmental disabilities. Scott lives in Willimantic with two other young men and he receives funding through DDS for residential supports provided by Horizons from South Windham and for day/employment supports provided by Opportunity Works Connecticut from Rockville.

I have been advocating before this committee about the DDS budget for a number of years. I am a member of The Arc of Connecticut Board of Directors, the Intellectual Disability Partnership Advisory Committee, and the Northeastern Connecticut Families for Families. I have also served for 6 years on the DDS North Regional Advisory and Planning Committee.

Increase funding for community nonprofits:

Currently community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. I am here to 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 fourteen years. I am asking you to 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.

I was very disappointed when Commissioner Scheff in response to a question from an Appropriations Committee member during his testimony last week about why he did not ask for more funding for private providers and funds for those on the residential Waiting List, said that is not the right time to ask for more money. My question to him and to members of the Appropriations Committee is,

If not now, when?

It was more than one year ago now in an article in the CT Mirror ([Phanuef, K. \(2020\) 'Lamont eyes emergency budget cuts, even as reserves swell', The CT Mirror, January 6](#)) about Governor Lamont's announcement of emergency cuts in spite of a projected \$290 million budget surplus that Representative Toni Walker, Co-Chair of the Appropriations Committee acknowledged that the previous years of budget cuts have had a devastating impact on the services that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families rely on.

"Walker said the last eight years took a heavy toll on the social services safety net and some of Connecticut's most vulnerable residents."

"It was dramatic," she said, arguing many of the hundreds of community-based nonprofits that Connecticut hires to deliver social services are hanging on by a thread. "They can't afford to stay in business any more. We're destroying the infrastructure we have here."

And shortly after that time, we began living in a world overwhelmed by Covid-19.

Decades of cutting or underfunding the DDS budget has resulted in program closures, waiting lists for services, and a shortage of direct care professionals. Wages are low in the community nonprofits and some staff work two or three jobs, and rely on forms of public assistance themselves. The knowledge and responsibilities of the community nonprofits staff are impressive and they deserve to be paid considerably more than minimum wage. Even with the increase to \$14.25/hr recently, workers in private provider agencies are still paid 40-50% less than those in the public sector and staff turnover at community-based agencies is high. It is time to get serious about providing quality care to people with disabilities by providing the funding necessary to pay their professional staff a Living Wage.

Fund the Residential Waiting List:

According to the DDS Management Information Report dated December 2020, there are 901 individuals classified as an EMERGENCY or URGENT on the DDS Residential Waiting List and there are 1,004 individuals classified as FUTURE NEEDS (982 of them have indicated they want and will need services within five years).

Many of my son's friends are still living at home with their parents, just waiting for the opportunity to start their lives in their own homes! DDS did revive the housing initiative for individuals with a parent over the age of 70 and has been able to provide residential support for some young adults to move into IDASH units in Canton (and Bloomfield soon). But there are still so many people on the Waiting List and they should not have to become an emergency before residential supports are available to them. Please do not tell these constituents that they are not a priority again this next year!

NOW is the time to provide a Living Wage for staff at community nonprofits and fund the DDS Residential Waiting List!

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

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