



Public Hearing on:

**H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023,
And Making Appropriations Therefor.**

Health Subcommittee

Tuesday, March 2, 10:00 am

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

My name is Denise Canady and I have been working at Marrakech for 25 years, a private nonprofit agency that supports over a thousand people with disabilities and similar service needs, and with over 700 staff, throughout Connecticut. I started my career with Marrakech as a student at Marrakech's Academy for Human Service Training. Like myself, the people who attend the training academy are black or brown and come from low-income, underserved, and often times overlooked communities. After successfully completing the 16-week comprehensive training program, I began working part-time as a program counselor and was steadily promoted during my 25-year tenure. Today, I am the Chief Compliance Officer. In my role as the Chief Compliance Officer, I ensure that the programs at Marrakech are in compliance with the rules, regulations, and terms of service from agencies and funding sources. I am also responsible for advocating on behalf of the people we support and employees. That is why I am here today.

Marrakech provides critical, essential services to our most vulnerable population. We have worked safely throughout the pandemic and couldn't stop because we support people 24/7. Marrakech handled the onset of COVID best, protecting the health and safety of employees and people supported by being creative to set up live in positions and task forces to ensure that there was as few human to human exposures possible. We kept everyone employed with no layoffs, through the task forces we set up to support our programs. The task forces took PPE orders and deliveries, laundry service to avoid public laundromats, food deliveries, cleaning supplies, etc.

We are deemed critically essential, yet Marrakech and all of the other human service private nonprofits have not received a Cost of Living Increase (COLA) since 2007, when the first iPhone or Segway was created. There was nothing paid to nonprofits to pay for our medical benefit cost increases, our retirement savings, our program upgrades, etc., for 14 years!

I work at Marrakech because I care about the people here, my coworkers and the people we support. I have worked here without any promise of COLAs or increases. Most of us working at Marrakech (70%) including myself identify as black or brown which is similar as the other nonprofits in the state. The people we support, their caregivers and our hard work on behalf of the most vulnerable people appear not to be valued in Connecticut. We provide high quality services for a fraction of the cost of State-Run services. This inequity should end.

It is hard enough to recruit staff to work in our programs due to pay rates, cost and benefit coverage, responsibilities, the pandemic, etc. Without fixing the years with no increases I don't know how we will

keep going in the future. We have seen our Critically Essential Staff take jobs at higher salaries in non-critical roles.

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. They are what make Connecticut a great place to live and work.

Recently, I discovered that the Department of Developmental Services is looking to hire 200 part-time employees in an effort to reduce their overtime. Our staff make \$14.75 to perform the same duties as a DDS direct care employee yet the starting rate for a DDS direct care employee is \$24.00. So, not only are we faced with the possibility of our employees leaving to go work for the state where they will make more than they make at Marrakech working part-time hour, it will be more challenging to fill the vacant positions when those employees leave.

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 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.

Please commit to increasing funding for community nonprofits by \$461 million over five years. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time.

Denise Canady