

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 Geoff Crandall and I am the Director of Programs for Kuhn Employment Opportunities. Kuhn provides employment and day program support to nearly 400 individuals funded by the Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

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.

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.

I would like 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.

The pandemic has impacted the employment status of many individuals we serve. Our staff have continued to support these individuals in dealing with their job loss by helping them with filing for unemployment, connecting them with other agencies who helped with issues like food and housing insecurity and in the search for new jobs. While other individuals were lucky enough to continue working, their support needs also increased as they were often employed in sectors such as grocery stores and warehouses where increased demands and worries about their own health and that of their family members led to a more stressful work environment.

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:

- Providing hazard pay for essential workers on the front lines with a higher risk of exposure;
- Procuring expensive and hard to find Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies;
- Creating telehealth services seemingly overnight, and purchasing necessary computers, cybersecurity, online meeting platforms and training for both staff and people receiving services.

- Many community nonprofits never closed their doors even as the pandemic worsened.

Past budget cuts have decreased the capacity of our DMHAS funded services by 50 which has led to longer wait times for individuals in need of employment services. This need continues to increase as individuals affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic look for support in locating new employment opportunities. Chronic underfunding has also made it more difficult for agencies such as Kuhn to retain qualified staff and caused us to defer items such as building maintenance that can lead to larger unplanned expenses as facilities deteriorate.

Demand continues to increase as funding is cut.

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Department of Developmental Services

- Please reinvest the proposed savings of \$4.1 million by transitioning approximately 300 people to Individual Supported Employment Services from group-supported employment or day services to serve people with I/DD, rather than balancing the budget.
- Please reinvest the proposed savings of \$2.3 million from funding reductions in the Behavioral Services Program to serve people with I/DD, rather than balancing the budget.
- Please ensure that the proposed savings of \$1 million in each fiscal year from closing one public Community Living Arrangement is reinvested to serve people with I/DD, rather than balancing the budget.

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

- The need for mental health and substance abuse treatment services is expected to grow significantly as we emerge from the pandemic. Now is the time to invest in substantial improvements and enhancements to the behavioral health system, not the time to flat-fund the DMHAS budget.
- Please support the \$6.3 million increase in Discharge & Diversion Services. Community nonprofits can help people avoid most costly care (EDs, jails, or shelters) and get them on a path toward recovery.

Department of Public Health

- Please oppose the funding reduction to LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network. The State needs to continue to provide safe environments for people recovering from mental health and substance use.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my feedback

Sincerely,

Geoff Crandall

Kuhn Employment Opportunities

1630 North Colony Road

Meriden, CT. 06450

(203) 235-2583 ex. 114/ gcrandall@kuhnemployment.com