



**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 Jill Cretella. I have worked at Marrakech, Inc. for almost 22 years. Marrakech is a private, nonprofit organization that supports over a 1,000 people per year with intellectual and physical disabilities, those who are homeless, that have mental illness, and those with economic and other disadvantages – some of the most vulnerable people in our state. I have held many positions throughout my tenure at Marrakech. I started as a direct care professional in one of our behavioral health programs providing daily community support to young men with severe and persistent mental illness. I provided case management, job training and placement services to hundreds of people who came through our Academy for Human Service Training program. I helped manage the day and employment services for adults with intellectual disabilities. I provided supports to families to help them keep their children with disabilities home with them instead of having them moved to out of state residential settings. I developed and ran life skills and wrap around programs for youth in foster care. That is just a few of the things I have done here. I am proud of the services we provide. We always consider the health and safety of the people we support in conjunction with helping them take steps toward independence and living the best life possible – the life they want to live.

In my current role of Chief Administrative Officer, one of the departments I am responsible for is Human Resources. I went from having a handful of employees I felt responsible for as a supervisor to now having over 700. Our employees are amazing. This became even more obvious when the pandemic started. There was, and is, no option for us to close for any period of time. We provide 24/7 supports to people who depend on us. Our staff are essential. They volunteered to move into our residential sites to reduce the number of people coming in and out; others willingly served on a task force to help grocery shop, do laundry, and deliver supplies to the homes so that the people living there could have reduced exposures. Hundreds of staff kept doing what they do every day – provide the in-home supports to people living on their own, open our Taking Initiative Center for those who are homeless, and continue to job coach people who are working and depend on the on-site support for their continued employment. Nothing stopped here.

While it is appreciated that the state officially recognized our employees as Essential Workers, that only goes so far when you realize that we have not had a real COLA since 2007. Can you imagine that - 2007? Can you imagine working for an employer for over 14 years with no promise or possibility of an increase unless you get promoted? Yet, over 28% of our employees have worked here 10 years or longer, and over 12% have been here 15 years or longer. We stay because we care about the people we support and each other. But that should not come at a personal price. Considering the complexity and need for the work our staff do, they should not have to work multiple jobs to take care of their families. The

work that they do should be valued enough to provide a livable wage with a reasonable annual COLA, something they can depend on. Some staff who do leave us do not actually want to go anywhere else – but sometimes they have to just for the pay. How do nonprofits compete in recruitment and retention when someone can get a higher wage at Costco or Amazon without the responsibility of caring for another human’s life? Having compassion for others should not equate to personal sacrifice.

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 am respectfully **requesting 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.** I can be reached at [jcretella@marrakechinc.org](mailto:jcretella@marrakechinc.org) or (203) 415-1432.

Thank you for your time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe A.", with a large, stylized initial "J" and a smaller "A" to its right.