

PUBLIC HEARING ON
HB 6439
AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE
13TH, 2023 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

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

My name is Deirdhre Delaney and I'm here to talk about HB 6439 in my capacity as board secretary at the nonprofit agency Horizons. Horizons has been around a long time, providing year round supports for people who have developmental disabilities; I know many of you are familiar with our work and some have visited and seen it firsthand. As a board member, I am frequently on the Horizons campus in South Windham, volunteering at Intake days every summer when I meet and assist hundreds of campers and their families.

I have come to know many of the individuals supported by Horizons. They are remarkable and impressive people from whom I have learned valuable lessons about resilience and strength and unconditional love.

I have also come to know - in many cases quite well - the staff who provide the supports to those individuals on a daily basis, 12 months a year. The dedication and passion they bring to their work is inspiring. Each staff member is a well-trained, thoroughly committed part of an ensemble, an intricate system of round-the-clock person-centered supports. To succeed, all of them form profound connections to the folks they work with. That is what the work requires. It is all-consuming and taxing, both physically and emotionally. One has to be detail-oriented, conscientious and vigilant. Every day is different. This is not work that can be done half-heartedly. It requires sincere commitment and a personal investment in maintaining close relationships with individuals who rely on that system of support to survive.

As I've come to know these dedicated professionals, I have also come to learn about the financial difficulties they face. Making ends meet on a nonprofit employee's salary is a challenge, especially so if you are your family's primary breadwinner. Many Horizons staff who fit that description have to take on second and third jobs to pay rent and put food on the table. Some I know receive energy assistance to pay their fuel bills. Others who can't afford the high deductibles in the Horizons health insurance packages are forced to use HUSKY.

This may indeed be the new reality for countless workers in our current economy and I'm aware that Horizons employees are not alone in this regard. But the work they do is essential! It is mandated by the state of Connecticut!

To continue doing what it does, Horizons must be able to compensate its workers fairly. The work they do as employees of a private nonprofit is essential. It is work that for decades was done by the state at far greater cost. In the 1970s, community nonprofits like Horizons were charged with providing individualized, high quality services as an alternative. Since 1979, Horizons - along with many other nonprofit agencies around the state - has met that charge with innovation and efficiency and a lot of ingenuity and belt-tightening along the way.

The bottom line? Horizons and agencies like it do this essential work less expensively than the state ever did or currently is able to. DDS routinely seeks guidance from nonprofits like Horizons to develop best policies and practices. Indeed, in terms of providing better services, the nonprofit model as a whole has been a unqualified improvement over the old state-run system. For the people served, these systematic changes have been largely a success.

However, in terms of providing fair wages to the people who work in these valuable and important public service jobs, it is a different story. A company is only as good as the people who work there. Finding and keeping good employees is a significant challenge for agencies like Horizons. To succeed, Horizons needs to be able to continue hiring and retaining the kind of quality individuals needed to make the enterprise work.

What are we as a state? Is Connecticut the forward thinking leader that it likes to think it is? That draws the best and the brightest and doesn't flinch from doing what is necessary for its essential workers? That looks after the best interests of ALL its citizens? Or is it something different now?

We ask that the state provide a fair living wage to the hardworking, often invisible professionals who provide the essential services that used to be provided by the state. They dedicate themselves to helping less fortunate individuals lead dignified and fulfilling lives. Your actions can help assure that the lives of these deserving professionals are dignified and fulfilling as well.

Thank you for your time,

Most sincerely,

Deirdhre Delaney

Board secretary

Horizons

- **Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28% by fiscal year 2026**
- **Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement)
Funding for community nonprofits in fiscal year 2022, a 7% increase**
- * **Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with Increased costs**