

Appropriations Committee
H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023
And Making Appropriations Therefor. Health Subcommittee
Public Hearing via Zoom

Tuesday, March 2, 2021 10:00am

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

My name is Heather Dierberger. I am employed by MARC Community Resources and a resident of Marlborough. I am testifying today in support for H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor

We empower people with autism & I/DD and provide day, employment, and residential services. Our group homes operate on a fixed budget. 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 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.

As the Human Resources Coordinator for MARC Community Resources, I have seen firsthand how 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.

Over the last thirteen years, we have seen significant increases in health insurance, cost of vehicles to transport our individuals, gas, utilities and a number of other significant costs yet we've seen no increases in our rates to assist with the increases in cost. Also, we are not allowed to retain profits, which means there is no funding available to cover any excess costs that we are incurring.

The state has not increased rates for direct care staff hourly wages. With the minimum wage increasing to \$15.00 per hour, there has been no communication from the state on whether they will be increasing funding for hourly wages. It is also important to recognize the costs of the training and certification requirements per DDS required for our direct care staff, many of which require medical certifications to care for our individuals who have significant health needs.

Demand continues to increase as funding is cut. **I thank the Committee for raising this important bill and urge you to support H.B. 6439**

Sincerely,

Heather Dierberger

Heather Dierberger
Human Resources Coordinator- MARC Community Resources