

# BARC

## Bristol Adult Resource Center

Serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1957

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March 2, 2021

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

My name is Mary Etter, and I am the executive director at Bristol Adult Resource Center (also known as BARC). We support 150 people with developmental disabilities in day programs and 38 people in residential programs. We employ nearly 200 people and we serve the greater Bristol area. I am also a board member at MARCH Inc of Manchester, which supports individuals in Manchester, Vernon, Columbia, Windsor and Willimantic.

I appreciate 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.**

I am here to respectfully request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over the next 5 years for community nonprofits. Community nonprofits have lost at least that much in state funding since 2007 – our funding has not kept pace with inflation nor adequately covered increased costs and demand for services. Please make this commitment to increase our funding by this amount by fiscal year 2026. Please appropriate \$128 million (this costs the state \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for fiscal year 2022. Please index increases to inflation, so that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future. And please – hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19.

While much of the state closed down last March, BARC's staff was not able to "stay home and stay safe." Our residential programs remained operational the entire time. Staff continued working, at times putting themselves and their families at risk of catching COVID. Our workforce is ethnically and racially diverse. Last spring, we had some staff who were pulled over on their way to work and questioned as to why they were out, even though BARC was considered an "essential business". I was asked by our staff to provide them with a letter showing that they were in fact essential employees.

Getting employees to their jobs was just one of the many obstacles we faced while serving our individuals. The challenges to keep everyone safe and healthy during the pandemic proved to be a difficult and expensive task. We had four residents who contracted the virus last spring...one person had only mild symptoms, two had hospital stays of approximately 1 week, and the fourth person unfortunately passed away from the virus. We have only had four additional cases this fall/winter. We thought it could have been much worse given their vulnerability and we think that the many precautions and protocols we had in place were the reason we didn't experience more sickness.

We do not receive full funding for our homes if there is a vacancy, and our staffing levels do not decrease with a vacancy. Most of our homes are staffed by one person for three individuals...we can't reduce that any lower if there are only two people living in the home. The pandemic has created challenges to safely filling our vacancies. One empty bed can cost our agency \$80,000 - \$130,000 per year.

There isn't enough money in the world to pay our employees what they truly deserve. We find it increasingly difficult to staff our programs because companies like Walmart and Costco have increased their pay. Thank you for your support of the nonprofit sector and the very important work we do - we need your help to ensure that programs like ours will continue to exist for Connecticut's adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.