



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:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439. I am Denise Henry, the CEO for SARAH Inc. Our agency delivers Early Intervention services and supports for adults with intellectual disabilities to more than 1400 people in 50 towns across 5 counties. We are able to do this work thanks to our more than 130 employees that live and work in your communities.

As you will hear many times today because these points are so important, Community nonprofits provide critical services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. We nonprofits help make Connecticut a great place to live and work.

I am here to once again 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.

I say once again because at this time last year just before we had to radically change how we live and work, I sat before this committee, making a case for the very same request. Now a year later nonprofits have been further strained by the costs associated with continuing throughout this pandemic to safely deliver essential services to the people and communities we support.

I can't say enough about the dedication and resiliency of our staff. It is thanks to them we have been able to continue our work. Make no mistake, the work of our adult services staff, has always been challenging, but now even more so. Our staff had to juggle virtual learning for their children, unpredictable in-person learning school schedules, and the threats of COVID-19 in order to financially support their families. Similar to other nonprofits, many of our employees are women and from minority communities. A funding increase for nonprofits will help stabilize and strengthen our businesses and it will mean a pay increase for our staff. Our direct support staff deserve to make a living wage. This is a social justice issue. This is an equity issue. It is also simple math; we won't be able to continue to hire and retain staff if their pay does not outpace the state minimum wage increases.

As dire as the situation is, this time virtually sitting before you I have more hope than I ever have before. I have more hope that this is finally the year nonprofits will receive the funding increase needed to remain in business and pay their staff a better wage. I am more hopeful because this year when speaking with legislators from both sides of the aisle about the need for funding increase, you get it. You know we have been chronically underfunded, that the pandemic has proven especially difficult for many of us, and that a funding increase can no

longer wait. Legislators are always appreciative of our work, which we nonprofits welcome, but this needs to be the year your words are turned into action by committing to an increase in funding by the full \$461 million. I truly hope that it is for the sake of the people who need our services, and the dedicated employees that are long overdue a living wage.

Thank you.

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