



Good day Representative Walker, Senator Osten, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Joyce Lewis. I am the Executive Vice President of Key Human Services, Inc. a private nonprofit business supporting individuals with disabilities across the lifespan statewide.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am here today to thank you for the funding 2 years ago to raise our Direct Care Professionals' wages to \$14.75/hour. This increase has changed the lives of so many of our employees. Thank you! This was an important step in recognizing the importance of the work they do every day. Their work is not minimum wage work.

Today I ask you to take the next step- to fund the differential wage increase as the minimum wage increases. The differential established 2 years ago recognizes the responsibility inherent in the work. At Key, our mission is to "Act as a change agent...". Our Direct Support Professionals are called upon to intentionally seek out opportunities to facilitate independence and connection to the community that suits the skills and interests of the individuals they support. Again, their work is not minimum wage work. Please don't let the minimum wage increases erode the commitment made to these crucial workers.

There has been no additional funding to support maintaining the differential wage since the first change although the minimum wage is now \$12/hr soon to be \$13. In fact, the original funding is not keeping pace with change as new individuals are served or fill vacancies when individuals have passed away this year due to Covid.

This year has been incredibly hard for everyone. The beginning of Covid was terrifying and required incredible adaptability on everyone's part. We appreciate the support we received from DDS through those times and the supports we continue to receive. However, residential programs have not received funding support since July. The challenges remain monumental - hiring... this is a direct care, low wage, high health risk profession.... Not an easy position to fill during Covid. Next challenge... staffing coverage as many individuals are still home from day program...we are not staffed or funded for these hours. Next challenge.. med certification ... staff need to cover meds in homes where staff have not been able to get med certified.... All

these challenges add up to ...Overtime, overtime, overtime! Last but the most important... the true crisis... Since November, we have had 7 homes where every individual had Covid and 3 others where most of the individuals had Covid. Three individuals have passed away. The majority of staff have also been effected. We don't have the resources to appropriately support our staff, our managers, our nurses to endure through these times. Where is the funding for hero pay, paid time off, temporary staff? We need more financial support; Covid funding ended but Covid did not.

Connecticut nonprofits are dangerously underfunded. 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 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:

Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2025;
Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

Thank you for your consideration!

Joyce Lewis
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