

March 1, 2021

Appropriations Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for Health Agencies

I am writing to you about a most important need in our state where my intellectually / developmentally disabled brother lives (Watertown). He resides in a group home run by Oak Hill, a private non-profit organization employing more than 1,700 workers in Connecticut. Oak Hill is a Provider of multiple services with the State of Connecticut's Departments of Developmental Services, Social Services as well as Children and Families. Oak Hill is a recognized vendor by the Home and Community Based Service Waiver.

My brother has a very rare syndrome resulting in multi-handicapping conditions and severe medical concerns. His mother passed from COVID at The Willows Nursing Home in Woodbridge, CT, during the first weeks of the pandemic in April. My sister and I are currently his guardians. He requires 24/7 care, and receives specialty healthcare services from a group of dedicated, hardworking staff. The direct support professionals and nurses provide more than daily care. Most important since last March is that my brother and his housemates have been kept safe, healthy and comfortable in spite of the raging pandemic which has caused sickness and death for so many, in congregate settings. Due to full-time community day programs being shuttered, the home environment has required extra creativity to follow the prescribed active treatment programs usually structured in an Oak Hill run day program in Waterbury.

For the 2021 budget, I am urging that Connecticut legislators recognize the value of well-trained direct service professionals and other Oak Hill staff who work so hard, often extra shifts, maintaining a limited core staff during and due to COVID-19. They don personal protective equipment (PPE) and follow the frequently updated policies from the CDC, CT Department of Public Health, CT Department of Developmental Services and Oak Hill's own strict regulations for infection control. Even with the snowy weather this winter and needed sick days, the staff at my brother's home covered every shift, and sacrificed time spent with their own families; not to mention the hazard of potential infection to themselves. They are my brother's family, especially as our visits with him are limited to remote ones.

Connecticut has failed to grant nonprofit providers (like Oak Hill) a rate increase over the past **14 years**. Over that time, the Bureau for Economic Analysis gross domestic price index grew by 28%.

The result today is that Oak Hill struggles to guarantee a livable wage for these essential workers. This inequity is fundamentally unfair to these workers who have given 100% to their clients. During our Zoom meetings, we can see the dedication in everything they do to keep my brother safe, well and loved.

I urge you to please help legislate for Oak Hill and the other providers in the state with a substantial rate increase that will assure quality and dependent care for residents and a competitive, livable wage for the workers. The Oak Hill staff have literally been working around the clock.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Please recognize and support Oak Hill and the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services. Their service to our brother, and to all those residents in the State of Connecticut relying on their services, should not go unrewarded.

I have always voted for you in the past. Please consider my interests. You have the power to legislate public policy.

Submitted by,

Linda G. Livolsi
Sister of Gary Garozzo
Oak Hill Watertown Facility