

Public Hearing H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2023

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

I would like to submit written testimony regarding DDS funding, the state budget, and non-profits. I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Community Non-profits provide essential services to needy individuals in every CT town. Non-profits are major employers in the state and sustain a work force in the tens of thousands. During the pandemic, non-profit, essential employees put themselves at risk to ensure the safety net remained intact. Without these essential services, thousands of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens would have been at risk.

CT non-profits supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities have endured decades without substantial COLA's and years of budget cuts. This has caused non-profits to shutter services, restrict expansion, cut costs, cut personnel, and pass on costs of rising health care to employees. Increases in liability and workers' compensation insurance, rising fuel and food costs, and increases in utility expenses have pulled resources away from serving individuals in need.

Lack of COLA's has resulted in a looming crisis which is now fully upon us. Stagnated wages of direct support workers have resulted in high turnover, vacant positions, and difficult retention efforts. Even with the generous wage increase in 2019, rising minimum wages at retailers such as Wal-Mart, Target, and Costco have made it difficult for caring, committed staff to remain in the field. The choice for staff is a caring profession where working two jobs is necessary or leaving the field for one that will allow them to support their families. Lack of COLA's leave critically necessary direct care workers earning minimum wage with no raises. It will be impossible to recruit, train, and retain qualified, caring, and committed staff to care for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

This is a value question. Do we value people with Intellectual Disabilities and the DSP's that provide them with a healthy and safe life? I am respectfully requesting that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over 5 years for community non-profits. Non-profits have lost at least that much in the last decade or more as funding has not kept pace with inflation and rising costs of care. It is critical that DSP's earn a wage commensurate with the tasks they perform.

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.

Without a significant influx of resources into the community non-profit system there will be even more dangerously short staffing scenarios, massive vacant positions, and a critically fragile support system that has reached its breaking point.

Respectfully,

Sherri Mallinson  
Community Residences Inc. Associate Executive Director