

Testimony for :

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:

My name is Christine Olbrys, and I am speaking to you on behalf of UCP of Eastern Connecticut. UCP's mission is to advance the independence and full citizenship of individuals across a spectrum of disabilities, including Cerebral Palsy. UCP serves people throughout New London County and Middlesex County.

Thank you for 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.

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 am here to 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:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026;

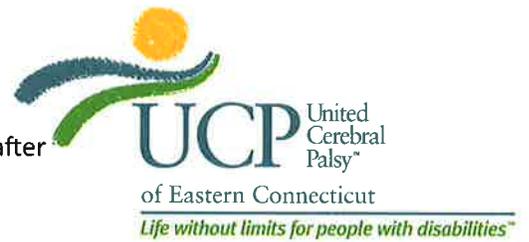
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2. Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2022, a 7% increase;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future;
4. Hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19.

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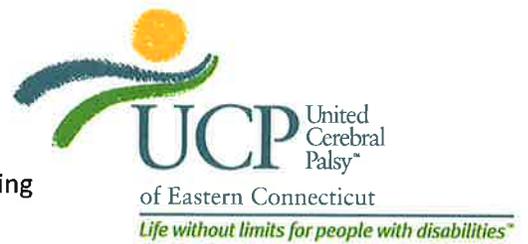
The COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS NEGATIVELY IMPACTED UCP of Eastern CT and the individuals we support.

UCP supports people who have significant cognitive and physical disabilities. The health risks associated with the pandemic caused people with disabilities to become isolated and took them away from their work, communities, and friendships because of the state requirements to stay home and stay safe, to ensure safety. Individuals who were active members of their local community, through working or volunteering, lost access to their community because of the pandemic. Volunteer and work sites were closed, and many continue to be closed today. This has caused individuals to lose their access to the tools and training needed to learn skills to become competitively employed or has resulted in lost jobs.

The pandemic also created staffing challenges. Many individuals who were no longer able to work or go to their community programs were forced to stay home, and UCP had to provide additional staffing support to keep people safe and meaningfully engaged. This created overtime expenses that outpaced typical overtime costs. Additionally, realizing it was the right thing to do, UCP began offering enhanced pay to employees during the pandemic, which rose above and beyond our budgeted staffing expenses.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the impact of inadequate funding for nonprofit services and brought unanticipated and unbudgeted costs and operational challenges for many community nonprofits, such as:

- Providing hazard pay for essential workers on the front lines with a higher risk of exposure;
- Procuring expensive and hard to find Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies;



- Creating telehealth services seemingly overnight, and purchasing necessary computers, cybersecurity, online meeting platforms and training for both staff and people receiving services;
- Many community nonprofits never closed their doors even as the pandemic worsened.

Historical budget cuts and chronic underfunding have made it very difficult for agencies to recruit, train and retain high quality, professional, experienced Direct Support Specialists, and to pay them at a competitive wage. By underfunding or cutting funds, providers are constantly challenged to deliver high quality services because of staff turnover.

Demand continues to increase as funding is cut.

UCP is asking the Department of Developmental Services

- Please reinvest the proposed savings of \$4.1 million by transitioning approximately 300 people to Individual Supported Employment Services from group-supported employment or day services to serve people with I/DD, rather than balancing the budget.
- Please reinvest the proposed savings of \$2.3 million from funding reductions in the Behavioral Services Program to serve people with I/DD, rather than balancing the budget.
- Please ensure that the proposed savings of \$1 million in each fiscal year from closing one public Community Living Arrangement is reinvested to serve people with I/DD, rather than balancing the budget.

Respectfully,

Christine Olbrys

Associate Executive Director

UCP of Eastern Connecticut

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