

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Kimberly Pettella, Mosaic, Embracing God's call, Mosaic relentlessly pursues opportunities that empower people./Serving adults with developmental disabilities

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;
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.

Over the past year, I have seen some incredible things that I never once thought I would experience in this field. I personally went out into store upon store trying to find PPE and cleaning supplies. Sacrificing my own safety to get these supplies. It was incredibly scary being without supplies, without things like gloves, the very minor things that keep us all safe. We were told that we are "essential employees", but are we?

While this was incredibly stressful, it did not compare to what the individuals in each home went through. In one home, while Covid loomed outside, individuals were meeting their end inside. They suffered long isolation periods from going in and out of the hospital. One hospital visit ended in the individuals contracting Covid. Staffing was incredibly difficult to maintain ratio but every day those that were dedicated came in, and assisted the individuals through hospice and the end of life stages with grace and dignity that brought a tear to my eye on a daily basis. Heroes were made, both those we lost

and those that made the process one filled with love, abet behind a mask. If you have ever walked someone through the process, you know what that takes. Yet, they are seen as undeserving in the eyes of those that created this budget.

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.

The pandemic did not decrease our need for staff, if anything it doubled. With everyone home from day program, it was a constant trial to ensure every home was equipped with enough staff, and that they were paid fairly to expose themselves, many of whom felt they were not. They would be right. Essential workers are just that, essential. And now, not only are they essential bodies to have but they all must be attuned to the ever changing ways of zoom calls, telehealth visits, and facetime-ing with loved ones. They had to try to provide a sense of normalcy for those who did not understand why they couldn't leave the house, or see their families. It is such a constant trial and to be excluded in this manner is a disgrace.

Demand continues to increase as funding is cut.