

Public Hearing Testimony
[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:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the State Budget ending in 2023.

My name is Glenna Rains and I work at Ability Beyond, a nonprofit based in Bethel that provides services for individuals with a variety of disabilities. I manage our employment programs for adults living with mental illness in the greater Norwalk and greater Danbury areas. These DMHAS-funded programs serve over 160 people at any given time, providing them with supports to both find employment and to maintain their employment.

Please be aware that for the last year, during this unprecedented time, we never closed our program even for a day. We were always available to clients and had to quickly adapt how we provide those services. As a best practice, our types of services take place in the community, where we now have an unanticipated and significant cost of PPE for our staff and clients to keep them safe. We support individuals who were essential employees working during extremely stressful times, potentially exacerbating their illness and making maintaining their positions even more difficult. We served as a comfort and emotional support to them throughout the past year as well as assisting them in navigating new job responsibilities, stress, and changes.

With unemployment being so high, even more people are looking for work, making a program such as ours critical to economic recovery. Many of the individuals we support remain on furlough from the jobs they held prior to the pandemic, and rely on unemployment unless our program can find them something else. This essential job done by our team and other non-profits that provide employment services was already hard. The pandemic has made it significantly harder. Despite that, our team has found over 100 new positions for individuals since March of last year.

Without our program, fewer people will be able to contribute to their communities. Employment programs have a significant reach beyond the people we serve. Our clients become taxpaying citizens and reduce their reliance on food stamps and other public assistance programs. Employment also promotes a positive self-image and helps people make progress in their mental health recovery.

Because of decreased funding, we have not had pay raises in three years. Inability to provide raises has negatively impacted staff turnover. We need qualified and skilled staff who can assist our individuals, and the year after year of funding decreases directly impacts our ability to attract the strongest candidates and offer the best support possible as people leave the important human services field. Every time a team member leaves, this has a direct impact on the individuals we support.

As a result of this pandemic, there will be more people experiencing mental health issues, and therefore even more people needing our services. The need for mental health and services is expected to grow

significantly as we emerge from the pandemic. Now, when people are at their most vulnerable, when there are increased costs for PPE and technology coupled with a lack of increased funding making our programs vulnerable as well, is the time to invest in substantial improvements and enhancements to the behavioral health system, not the time to flat-fund the DMHAS budget.

I am here to respectfully request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits like Ability Beyond. 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.

Thank you for your time,

Glenna Rains, CESP
Ability Beyond