

DATE: March 2, 2021

TO: Appropriations Committee

FROM: Rick Sebastian, President of The Kennedy Center, Inc.

RE: H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor

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

My name is Rick Sebastian, I am the father of a 41-year-old daughter who has multiple, significant disabilities. I am a registered voter and taxpayer to the state of Connecticut. I am speaking today as the President and CEO of the Kennedy Center, a 501c3, tax exempt, organization and state contractor, headquartered in Trumbull and serving and supporting more than 2000 people throughout the state. We have supported people with Intellectual/Developmental, Mental Health and a variety of other disabilities for 70 years.

Our purpose, as your contractors, is to advance the quality of life for people with disabilities and to assure that they can thrive in their communities. We are essential, we are innovators, we are community based employers, we are health care providers, we are advocates, we give voice, we are consistent, we are exceptional, we are surrogate families, we are tireless in our pursuits of creating opportunities but are tired of too often being overlooked and forgotten in our states budget considerations.

Together with almost 13 years of fiscal inattention, a woeful lack of reimbursement for services rendered, and now almost 1 year of life altering impacts of COVID, your private human services contractors and your constituents that we serve, are on life support. We are in desperate need of increased and adequate funding and attention.

I respectfully request that you create a commitment and pathway to

1. Appropriate a 7% increase of \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community providers in Fiscal Year 2022
2. Index future increases to inflation, thus ensuring continuity of essential services
3. Increase funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026; and

4. Hold human service, not for profits, harmless from the devastating impacts of COVID.

One year ago, today, many of us began to address what would become COVID-19. COVID has had both devastating and opportunity impacts on us at The Kennedy Center. We have had 46 of the individuals we support diagnosed with COVID and sadly 4 have passed away. 9 of our 16 group homes have had positivity. 82 of our employees have been diagnosed and 25 of our employees have had family members and loved ones pass away.

We experienced our first positive diagnosis in March of 2020 and November 2020 thru today have seen the greatest increase in positive diagnoses. We have created two isolation units and have had to close group homes and day program sites to help eliminate the spread of the virus. Despite fears and challenges related to the virus, our employees continue to work each day in fulfillment of our purpose. They have made incredible sacrifices so that people with disabilities could continue to be supported.

During COVID, our organizations and more importantly our workers, have struggled to be identified and supported as essential health care workers. Our media and our government communications have spoken, recognized and celebrated the impact of grocery store clerks, delivery drivers, coffee baristas, yet very little, if any, have been directed to the essential work performed by our employees. Once again, despite showing up every day and fulfilling on our promises to the community, we are overlooked and forgotten faces.

Even with the many fears, anxieties, setbacks, and often being forgotten, a positive outcome during COVID has occurred for us. We struggled, as did many, to obtain PPE early on and rather than continue to struggle we began sourcing our own and since April 2020 have created a sourcing and distribution line of business, created new jobs for people with and without disabilities. We have provided nearly 40,000 people, small and big business, church communities, health care providers, schools, local, state and federal agencies with much needed PPE. This level of innovation and pivot has created some short-term sustainability for us and is leading to greater employment opportunities for our people.

Despite the ever-present funding shortages and the presence of COVID and its impacts, we remain committed to ensuring that your most vulnerable constituents thrive in their communities. We ask however that you commit to us so that we can fulfill the promises that we collectively make. Continuing the path we have been on for the past 13 years will devastate not only our organizations, but each of our communities. "If not now, when?"

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on your budgetary work.