

March 2, 2021

From: Peter Saverine

Director of Philanthropy

STAR, Inc., Lighting the Way...

I would like to thank all the members of the committee for the time, attention, and consideration you are giving to this important budget decision that affects the lives of people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers. Many of us are here today to share our voices to benefit those who may not be able to share their own.

My name is Peter Saverine, I am the Director of Development at STAR, Inc, Lighting the Way serving people with I/DD in lower Fairfield County since 1952. I am a resident in Darien. I have worked for STAR for almost 8 years and have been associated with the organization as a donor, employer, and volunteer for over 30 years. Since my job focuses on raising funds to fill the gap in state and insurance funding and providing extra resources to sustain and enhance critical programs, it is important that I can share the message, culture, and vision of the organization. Likewise, I make it a point to listen to the stories of clients, their families, and the staff so, whenever possible, I can facilitate funding that fills a need, delivers a dream, or helps with hope of a bright future.

Every day I witness firsthand the incredible dedication, selflessness, and hard work performed by our direct care staff. Being a grandfather of eight (under the age of eight) I am amazed that my children are unable to find a babysitter in the neighborhood for under \$20 an hour—and in some cases much more! However, we ask our direct care staff—the lifeline for medically fragile clients to work for \$14.75 with random raises that historically might come once every 7 years! These staff members are not babysitters watching movies and making popcorn, they are administering meds, showering clients, changing clients, driving vans with special PSL licensing, and specially trained in CPR. On average, our entry level staff member is receiving over 40 hours of specialized training annually. COVID-19 has increased the demands, stress, and commitment of these essential individuals. Many have made great personal sacrifices to protect our clients during the pandemic—many agreeing to quarantine in the group home with clients rather than returning to their own children and family. All have been trained on special Pandemic Protocols and work with each client individually to ensure compliance with masks, social distancing, and handwashing. Yet we stand here needing to fight for fair wages that allow them to support their own families, reward them for critical services rendered, and to encourage them to stay in their positions while they can easily segue to a fast-food restaurant for the same or more and only worry about burning the French fries. I have even witnessed some of the STAR clients employed in the community making more money than those who are supporting them from STAR.

This should not be a hard decision. I urge you to each make the easy personal decision to fully fund nonprofits in this budget cycle and show your appreciation for the personal services and sacrifices rendered that literally improve and save lives. If you had a child or adult with I/DD in your family, would you really skimp on hiring a professional caregiver? Would you really think that \$14.75 is enough to pay the person giving your mother or father their essential meds? We are not hiring babysitters. We are

hiring lifesavers and we cannot afford to keep replacing them with new trainees because there is little hope for advancement and because fast food options are always knocking at their door. Please invest in the nonprofits this year...now, more than ever, we need to get on the right path.