



120 Holcomb Street
Hartford, CT 06112
860-242-2274
OakHillCT.org

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:

H.B. No. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023.

Submitted By: Stan Soby, Vice President, Public Policy and External Affairs

March 2, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Stan Soby, Vice President, Public Policy and External Affairs at Oak Hill. Oak Hill has been providing services for 126 years and is a leader in providing the highest quality community-based programs; through education, assistive technology, programs and advocacy, we set the standard in providing education and lifelong learning opportunities to enhance independence and quality of life for people with disabilities across the lifespan. Oak Hill and our affiliates Gilead Community Services and Easterseals, have over 20 distinct programs; 152 program sites, classrooms, and homes located in 77 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,700 professionals to successfully help meet the changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year. We are among the 300+ member agencies of the Alliance, the voice of Community Nonprofits. And here we are once again, with 14 years and counting of either no net increases or actual decreases in our rates, to ask for fair funding for the services we provide.

Madam Chairs, I thank you and those Members of the Committee who have voiced your public support for our work. One would have thought, given all that we have been through during the COVID pandemic as a country, a state, organizationally and individually, that this would be the year the Governor's proposed budget would recognize the value of the nonprofit providers to the citizens of Connecticut - the people we serve and those who serve them - who are too often devalued by the decisions made by our government. If you truly value those services as we have heard from you, now is the time to vote those values and commit to appropriately and adequately funding our services. Kicking the can down the road once again will mean cuts to vital services for thousands and additional program closures.

It is up to you as we are "price takers", not "price setters". We are not able to add a nickel to each coffee drink to cover rising costs. We have gone from lean to emaciated even before covering pandemic-related costs. This is not sustainable.

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 (CPI increase of 28%) or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last fourteen years. I ask that you 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.

Our Mission: Oak Hill sets the standard, partnering with people with disabilities, to provide services and solutions promoting independence, education, health and dignity.

We appreciate the past legislative initiative that gave us pass through dollars to raise the wages of some, but not all of, our deserving employees, the majority of whom are women and people of color. We continue to be challenged by other industries who have raised their hiring wage to \$15 per hour or higher. While understanding the rationale for doing so, we will be challenged by DDS's hiring of 200 part-time staff, as it will be at a wage some 50% higher than we nonprofits can offer. Sadly, we are talking about just staying ahead of minimum wage, when this worthy and challenging work is anything but minimum wage work. And, this framing masks the other costs to the State and to the dignity of the people committed to the work. Without adequate rates, we cannot address these inherent equity issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer your questions or provide additional information.