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H.B. 6439
An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023,
And Making Appropriations Therefor
March 2, 2021

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

My name is Mike Van Vlaenderen, I am a lifelong resident of eastern, CT. I have worked for Reliance Health (formerly Reliance House) for 30 years. Beginning as an Outreach Worker for our Homeless Outreach team in 1991, and currently serving as the agency's Chief Operating Officer. Reliance Health employs over 250 staff serving 1,500 individuals annually, with primary funding from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Department of Disability Services.

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.

I am sure you are already aware of the white paper put together by The Alliance, and I respectfully request that the legislature consider the request of \$461 million in funding over the next five years for community nonprofits. Funding that has unconscionably been withheld from the nonprofit sector for too long. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least this much 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 consider the following recommendations:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million 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.
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

Over the past 3 decades I have had a front row seat to witness the creativity, commitment, and passion of our staff in helping to foster the growth of our agency and expansion of the safety net of services for our most vulnerable residents, while continually being undermined and undercut by legislative funding decisions at every turn. From closing state hospitals and not funneling appropriate resources back into the most affected communities, to putting federal reimbursement dollars created on the backs of nonprofit employees into the state's general fund, to a complete and utter disregard for any sort of commitment to allow nonprofit staff, your constituents, to keep pace with cost of living increases as evidenced by flat funding for these services year after year after year. We are now solidly, **SOLIDLY**, into the second **DECADE** of losing ground to the increased cost of daily living, health insurance, and housing costs due to the state's lack of financial commitment to the very residents it purports to care about. And we're not talking about some marginal number of Connecticut residents doing niche work. We're talking about

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14% of the state's workforce serving half a million individuals and families every year, year after year, without fail. And quite frankly, without support from the very people who have been elected to meet the needs of ALL Connecticut's residents, continually praise the work that is being done in each and every community across this state, then turn a blind eye to even the most basic of asks. To simply keep up with the cost of living. So that folks with bachelors and master's degrees aren't getting food and medical assistance from the very same programs utilized by the members they serve and working for pay that will soon prove to be below the minimum wage.

Thank you for hearing me out. I understand the Appropriations Committee is all too aware of the urgency of this matter and the need to restore funding to the nonprofit sector of our state's economy.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Van Vlaenderen