



**Public Hearing on:**

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

I am Sherri Zummo, my son Robert Porter is profoundly deaf, autistic, intellectually disabled, legally blind and has numerous medical issues. Before my son graduated from high school at the American School for The Deaf, I had searched for 5 years for an agency that would be willing to start a home filled with peers and staff that could communicate fluently with ASL, I finally encountered Marrakech and we worked hard together to make that happen and it has. It is EXTREMELY difficult to find and train qualified staff who are also fluent in American Sign Language to work for the minimal wage that non profits are able to offer. These direct care staff work hard each and every day dealing with behavioral issues, aggression, medical issues, safety issues and at times complete care of some of their individuals. Marrakech has done a fantastic job, working hard to create a warm, loving, safe and communicably accessible home for my son and his housemates.

Before the pandemic hit, my son was being brought out in the community daily, bowling, movies, the gym, shopping, restaurants, deaf social events etc. for several months. Then the pandemic hit. That changed everything, I made the decision to bring my son home with me due to the visitation ban DDS put on their homes. My son went into severe crisis from his life coming to a complete halt. Marrakech worked hard to still try to help support us even from afar, some staff even facetimeing my son during times of stress to try to help our family keep him safe and calm. My son has immense strength. The police in my town now know if a call comes from my house they send 6 officers due to the level of his strength and endurance.

My son has now been back at his home since September, things are slowly calming down. The people that work directly with my son are putting in intensive love and support every second of everyday to try to help keep him on track. I promise you, this is no easy task. The sad part of all of this is that when we have good staff that put in their time, energy, blood, sweat and tears at work, but barely make a living wage, they eventually leave because they can't support themselves, never mind a family on the wages that are allotted to nonprofits. Direct Care staff are ESSENTIAL workers. They are true heroes. It is a disgrace that they aren't recognized and compensated for being so.

Increasing the pay rates for these ESSENTIAL workers would save the state money in the long run for the support of individuals like my son. There would be less chances of abuse and neglect, less chances of crisis situations when there are consistent changes in their lives. But MOST importantly....the most vulnerable individuals in our state would be given more stable and fruitful lives and the individuals

working with them wouldn't be leaving as often. Agencies would have less overhead with less trainings, less hiring, less overtime due to short staffing etc.

**PLEASE IMPLEMENT ADEQUATE RATE REIMBURSEMENT FOR MARRAKECH TO ENSURE THEY ARE ABLE TO RECRUIT, TRAIN, AND MAINTAIN STAFF BECAUSE THEY ARE ABLE TO PAY THEM A LIVABLE WAGE! THE COMPENSATION SHOULD MATCH THE JOB! THESE PEOPLE ARE NEEDED. THEY ARE ESSENTIAL. THEY MAKE A DIFFERENCE EVERYDAY!**

I would like to know that there will never be another 14 year timeframe in which the agency that cares for my loved one is not being reimbursed adequately with decent benefits in order to ensure well qualified well trained staff that do not need multiple jobs to make ends meet in Connecticut. 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 or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. 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.

Thank you for your time and your service.

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