

**Public Hearing on:**  
**[H.B. 6439](#) An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June  
Thirtieth, 2023**  
**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.

My name is Kathryn du Pree. I am the Executive Director of Benhaven, a non-profit organization that operates in the greater New Haven area. Benhaven serves individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and pervasive developmental disorders of all ages. Benhaven has been a provider in Connecticut for over 50 years helping individuals to realize their potential to live fulfilling lives. We serve over 250 individuals in educational, residential, employment and family support programs and employ 350 staff.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the pending bill concerning the appropriations for the Department of Developmental Services. I come before you to strongly support the proposal of the Alliance which represents hundreds of nonprofits like Benhaven, to increase the funding for the work all of us accomplish on behalf of individuals with disabilities. The Alliance has proposed a \$461 million increase in State appropriations for non-profits to be phased in by fiscal year 2026. Nonprofits have not seen an across the board COLA or rate increases in several years. I do appreciate the funding allocated two years ago that increased the wages of our direct support professionals to \$14.75 an hour. Individuals and families rely on these staff for their care, safety, supervision and growth. Their work is essential to the quality of lives of the individuals they support.

We have been exceedingly proud and grateful of the efforts of these staff throughout the pandemic. While staff saw raises two years ago, we as provider will not be able to continue these needed and appropriate increases without increased funding. Connecticut has made an important commitment to its

citizens who work in jobs that pay minimum wage by approving a phased-in increase to reach \$15 per hour. This increase to the minimum wage requires a commensurate increase to direct support staff. The expectations of these staff bring great responsibility and complexity to their work. They must master training in various topics including medication certification, behavior program techniques, CPR, and recognizing signs and symptoms of illness. They implement detailed program to help individuals become more independent and overcome behavioral challenges. Those who work in family homes work independently and must regularly exert their own judgment to address unique situations. The wages for our staff must increase yearly and be indexed against the incremental increases to the state's minimum wage.

There has not been an overall COLA or rate increase for DDS providers in many years. Without this critical funding, we as providers cannot keep pace with increasing costs, upgrade our outdated technology, nor can we adequately maintain our program and residential facilities. For these reasons I urge you to support this increase in funding for the nonprofits in Connecticut starting with an increase in this biennial budget. Because DDS has approved HCBS waivers 50% of this increase is reimbursed by the federal government.

I support the Governor's budget for DDS in regards to funding for age outs and school graduates but oppose the recommended \$2.3 million reduction in the Behavioral Services Program. This account is used to support children living at home with their families who present very significant behavioral challenges. It provides critical support for families who may otherwise need to consider out of home placement. The Governor has projected this reduction because each year adolescents become adults and no longer rely on this funding. However the money should be retained in this account to assist other families whose children present significant behavioral challenges. The needs of these families should be respected and addressed by offering in-home behavioral support.

Thank you for the chance to address this committee.

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