



community solutions, inc.

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DATE: March 3, 2021
TO: Appropriations Committee
FROM: Christina Cicero, Program Director, Lisa's WISH
RE: H.B. 6439: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor.

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

My name is Christina Cicero and I am the Program Director of Lisa's WISH, a youth residential program operated by Community Solutions, Inc. Since 1962, CSI has positively impacted the lives of our clients and their communities by providing services that facilitate skill development, enhance responsible citizenship, and increase overall well-being. We do this by providing programs like Lisa's WISH, which provides a warm, safe and structured independent living environment for young women in DCF care.

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.

Nonprofit organizations like Community Solutions provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands.

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.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, organizations like mine have incurred significant additional costs for personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, purchasing equipment to allow for remote work, and hazard pay for staff in our residential programs. At my organization alone, these costs have exceeded \$1 Million. While foundation grants and a PPP loan allowed us to survive for the last year, unless additional funding is appropriated for non-profit organizations we may be forced to close critical services all over the state.

Chronic under-funding has had a significant negative impact on non-profit service providers. Providing a safe environment for the young women at our program has been a challenge for the last year. Maintaining appropriate staffing, the cost of extra cleaning supplies and helping the girls process the pandemic have all contributed to the additional stress and cost for our staff and organization. This is why increased funding for non-profit service providers is so critical.

In addition to overall funding for non-profit service providers, I also ask that you:

- **Oppose the proposed budget for DCF, which would cut funding from and result in the closure of residential facilities for children** operated by nonprofits.
- Reinvest dollars into the existing service system. The Governor's budget reinvests some, but not all, of that funding into the establishment of Quality Parenting Centers, which is laudable – but creating these centers should not come at the expense of other existing programs.
- Ensure there is enough capacity in the congregate care system. The Governor's budget assumes that the congregate system has excess capacity, but that claim doesn't match our experience on the ground operating programs for children. Many young people need the structure and support a congregate care program provides and not having enough capacity could lead to crises for youth who need the support.
- Right now – in the midst of a pandemic when providers are working hard to ensure quality and access to care – is not the time to be taking funding OUT of the children's service delivery system.
- In addition, we are concerned that none of the Governor's bills implementing the budget include the **changes to Connecticut's zoning statutes** that would be necessary to allow this proposed change in existing congregate facilities to occur.