



CONNECTICUT  
LEGAL  
RIGHTS  
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.  
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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING  
MARCH 3, 2021

**Concerns regarding: HB 6439, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR, specifically the budgets for DSS and ADS**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

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Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I'm the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order which mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community.

Here we are again. Writing the testimony for today regarding these two agencies in the budget has been a very painful exercise, because there are proposed cuts in this budget that hurt some of the most vulnerable people in this state. We should not have to tell our "woe is us" stories and beg for pity (i.e., money) nor should we have to rely on philanthropy to meet our basic needs.

That assessment may seem harsh, but I have heard several members of this committee express similar concerns. Let's summarize some of these proposals so all can see what is in the fine print of the governor's budget proposal.

The governor's budget proposal finds "Savings through payment adjustments and administrative efficiencies." While reducing the capitated NEMT payments to reflect reduced use due to telehealth is likely a good thing, for the state to place **Quantity limits on medical devices and supplies** is a very bad thing, especially for the disabled people who rely on those medical devices and supplies. While I always appreciate incentives for people to have more opportunity to live in the community rather than in congregate settings like nursing homes, I'm not sure that **reducing inflationary adjustments to nursing homes** will result in that outcome, and in fact may simply result in reduced quality of care for the people who continue to live in nursing homes.

**Implementing an asset test for Medicare Savings Program** would result in people losing coverage. It would require additional bureaucracy at DSS to verify those assets at a time when many are retiring and the state is claiming to want to streamline government.

**Annualizing holdbacks and rescissions from FY 2021** locks in those reductions. Given that 2021 may have been a very odd year for health care utilization as a result of people not seeking necessary care as a result of the pandemic, it should not serve as a base year.

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One of the cruelest cuts in this year's budget proposal, a cut with which this legislature has agreed in prior years but must not agree with for this biennium is **REMOVING COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENTS FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS**. This cut truly balances the budget on the backs of the poorest residents of this state, those least able to bear the burden.

Another unacceptable cut is the proposal to reduce funding for various programs under the community services account (including a **cut of 168K to diaper bank**) – this cut places the burden of balancing the budget on the behinds of the tiniest and poorest residents of this state.

The governor's budget proposal again locks in rescissions when it comes to the **Department of Aging and Disability Services**, in a time when a global pandemic has disproportionately affected those who are older and created a whole new population of disabled people. In a particularly egregious cut, the governor has proposed a cut of 61K to **Independent Living Centers** – a 10% cut to that line. Those are crumbs stuck to the knife cutting the Connecticut budget pie, and yet,

here we are. These are centers that employ disabled people and serve people with disabilities during a time when the needs of our community have been disregarded by policymakers at the highest level of government. I urge you to reject this cut.

The budget needs to truly reflect this state's values. This is a proposed budget that shows a lack of care about poor and disabled people. Maybe those ARE the true values of some people in this state — but they certainly aren't mine and I sincerely hope they aren't yours.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today.