



**Appropriations Committee
Health Services Subcommittee Public Hearing
Tuesday, March 3, 2021, 10:00 am**

HB 6439--An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Susan Kelley, general counsel of Clifford W. Beers Guidance Clinic, Inc. Clifford Beers is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit providing behavioral health services to children and families in greater New Haven, and autism and related developmental services at our Marne Street Clinic. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023 and Making Appropriations Therefor.

We respectfully request that: the legislature provide \$461 million in state funding over five years for community nonprofits, including behavioral health providers; and maintain current DSS funding levels for The Diaper Bank of Connecticut.

1. Now more than ever, community providers require \$461 million in funding to continue providing services to our most vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 public health crisis and beyond. Community nonprofits, including behavioral health providers like Clifford Beers, are key partners with the state. They have been there day in and day out supporting the health and well-being of the neediest residents of our communities. Their commitment hasn't wavered despite losing \$461 million in state funding over the past 13 years, funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services.

Then COVID-19 hit in 2020. Even with underfunded services, Clifford Beers and other nonprofits stepped up to meet the challenges faced by their clients, increasing their technology infrastructure in order to quickly convert services over to telehealth and maintain their services. If there were any doubt during previous years as to whether the state should increase funding to community nonprofits, there isn't any doubt now.

2. It is time for the state to provide the financial commitment to behavioral health providers, like Clifford Beers, which struggle financially to provide services each year as the behavioral health/mental health needs of children and families continue to rise. Clifford Beers is a top nonprofit provider, distinguished by its commitment to coordinated care, wrap around case management and nationally recognized expertise in childhood trauma. Despite this status and quality services that help improve the lives of children and their families, Clifford Beers has received flat funding from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for the last 18 years. It received a 1 % increase for salaries in 2014 but otherwise has not seen cost of living increases under DCF contracted for services. Moreover, Clifford Beers and other nonprofit behavioral health providers operate at a loss for nearly every service they deliver due to wholly inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates. According to the Connecticut



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Community Providers Association report in 2015, Medicaid rates are so low that behavioral health providers lose a combined 27 million each year in the funding of the most utilized services.¹

Community nonprofits are at the tipping point. The challenges of COVID-19 have stressed and stretched to the limit already stressed health care and human systems. This is particularly true for residents who have the least resources and face the biggest challenges for accessing services due to lack of transportation, insecure housing, and unemployment. What is needed is for the state to hold up its end of the state/community nonprofit partnership and commit to invest \$461 million in community nonprofits to ensure that disadvantaged residents can get the mental health, substance abuse, and developmental disability services they need.

3. Maintaining funding for The Diaper Bank is a health equity issue—disadvantaged families require support as they struggle with accessing basic necessities during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-COVID.

The COVID-19 public health crisis has led to extraordinary strain on strain on families in Connecticut. For families who have lost their jobs and/or had their paid hours cut, The Diaper Bank has been crucial for them to access the material basic necessities for their children to survive and ultimately thrive. Even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, one in three families struggled to afford enough diapers to keep their child clean, dry, and healthy. Nearly a year into the pandemic and The Diaper Bank of Connecticut has seen a significant increase in the numbers of diapers distributed.

At Clifford Beers, we have been partnering with The Diaper Bank of Connecticut to get diapers to our clients as a matter of good health and integrated community care. Parents unable to diaper their children are more likely to suffer from parental depression. Without enough diapers each day, infants and toddlers are at risk of skin infections, open sores, urinary tract infections, and other conditions that may require medical attention. Current state funding is essential to meet the increased need now as well as post COVID as part of improving mental and physical health outcomes for all our residents.

For all of the above reasons, we urge that \$461 million in state funding be budgeted over five years for community nonprofits, including behavioral health providers; and maintain current DDS funding levels for the Diaper Bank.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan R. Kelley
General Counsel
Clifford W. Beers Guidance Clinic, Inc.

¹ "Prioritizing Community Based Services in CT, How investing in the cost of care for health and human services strengthens families, community and the state economy." B. Ferraj, MSW, Kathryn Rock-Burns, MPA, Spencer Cain, FPP, CT Community Providers Association, in collaboration with Cain Associates, LLC, February, 2015.