



State of Connecticut
Department of Aging and Disability Services

Amy Porter – Commissioner

**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
March 5, 2021**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee - my name is Amy Porter and I am Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS). I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of Governor Lamont's recommended budget, H.B. No. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor. Our agency is grateful that Governor Lamont's budget continues his administration's strong commitment to persons with disabilities and older adults.

Our Department's mission is "to maximize opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut." We have a diverse set of services that generally fall into five categories: employment, education, independent living, access and advocacy. We deliver these services with an incredible staff of approximately 450 dedicated professionals. ADS operates with a budget of approximately \$100 million, 72% of which comes from the federal government. On a state level, we receive funding from the General Fund, the Workers' Compensation Fund and the Insurance Fund. On a federal level, we receive funding from the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and the Social Security Administration.

The Governor's recommended biennial budget makes several notable changes to the appropriations for the Department, resulting in an overall net decrease of \$425,637 in FY 2022 and increase of \$218,848 in FY 2023 in both the General Fund and Workers' Compensation Fund.

Highlights of the proposed changes within the General Fund line items include the following:

- An increase of \$300,000 in the Vocational Rehabilitation – Disabled line reflects a reallocation from the Employment Opportunities program to the Vocational Rehabilitation program to maximize federal funding to the agency and will allow us to meet federal Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirements. This program assists individuals with disabilities to prepare for, enter, maintain or advance in employment. It is a federal/state partnership, with the federal contribution being 78.7% and a required state match of 21.3%.
- Decreases in the Employment Opportunities – Blind & Disabled line include a reallocation of \$300,000 to the Vocational Rehabilitation program and reductions totaling \$351,100 reflect savings achieved through program restructuring, and annualization of the FY 2021 rescission. This account provides long-term job supports for individuals

with the most significant disabilities after they have been able to maintain competitive employment for a minimum of 90 days. Several years ago, this program was restructured to focus on individuals working in competitive, integrated employment, which resulted in an overall savings. Support hours were capped with the ability to request additional hours if needed. This program does not have a waiting list.

- An increase of \$270,000 in the Programs for Senior Citizens line reflects a reallocation of existing funding for the Center for Medicare Advocacy (CMP) from the Department of Social Services since the work of CMP more closely aligns with the mission of our department. The CMP assists individuals and their families to obtain fair access to Medicare and necessary care and avoid becoming Medicaid eligible.
- Decreases in the Personal Services line include a reallocation of \$369,729 in FY 2022 and \$383,949 in FY 2023 for the consolidation of the Human Resources functions into the Department of Administrative Services consistent with a state-wide centralization of those services, and reductions totaling \$171,086 to reflect operational savings and annualization of the FY 2021 rescission. We anticipate being able to maintain our current staffing levels and achieve the required savings.
- A decrease of \$67,113 in the Other Expenses line reflects savings achieved by the agency by switching from vendor-provided support to our client case management system to internally provided support and annualization of the FY 2021 rescission.
- A decrease of \$26,527 in the Special Training for the Deaf Blind line reflects a change in contracted services to allow for the use of group activities, including virtual activities, in lieu of individual activities, when appropriate. This account provides communication, facilitation of environment awareness and transportation services to enable individuals who are deafblind to have access to community inclusion activities, including, but not limited to, socialization/recreation activities, support groups, counseling services and personal shopping.
- A decrease of \$61,723 in the Independent Living Centers line reflects a savings to be distributed equally across all Independent Living Centers (ILCs). This account provides pass-through funding to the five ILCs, which operate community-based facilities designed to promote the independence, productivity and quality of life of persons with disabilities.

The Workers' Compensation Fund provides rehabilitation services, through our Workers' Rehabilitation Program, for individuals injured on the job who are eligible for workers' compensation. Services are intended to help individuals return to gainful employment and include evaluation, aptitude testing, vocational counseling, job seeking skills training and on-the-job or formal training.

Highlights of the proposed changes within the Workers' Compensation Fund line items include the following:

- A decrease of \$55,624 in the Personal Services line reflects the savings achieved by the agency by refilling vacated positions at a lower salary than the previous incumbent.
- A decrease of \$5,382 in the Other Expenses line reflects savings achieved by the agency by switching from vendor-provided support of the client case management system to internally provided support.
- A decrease of \$111,192 in the Rehabilitative Services line reflects the programmatic changes resulting from decreased client referrals to this program by the Workers' Compensation Commission.
- A decrease of \$51,513 in the Fringe Benefits line reflects the savings achieved by the agency by refilling vacated positions at a lower salary than the previous incumbent, which lowers associated fringe benefit costs.

I want to thank Governor Lamont for his ongoing commitment to serving people with disabilities and the older residents of Connecticut. This budget allows the dedicated staff at the Department of Aging and Disability Services to continue working to maximize opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.

I thank the committee for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.