



Connecticut Community Providers Association
a unified voice for community human service providers

Labor and Public Employees Committee

March 14, 2006

**Re: S.B. 653 – An Act Expanding State Employment Opportunities
for People with Disabilities**

Good morning members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. I am Pauline Bouffard, the Director of Employment Services for the Arc of Meriden-Wallingford, Inc.

The Arc was founded by our local community to provide services for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Agency has been providing these valued services to over 200 people a day for over 50 years. We provide supported employment services to over 70 individuals with developmental disabilities every day.

I am pleased to be speaking with you today representing the Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA). CCPA represents organizations which provide services and supports for children and adults with disabilities and special needs including people with addictions, mental illness, developmental and physical disabilities.

The ARC of Meriden-Wallingford, along with many other community providers, serves individuals through supported employment settings throughout the state, many of which fall under section 17 B 656 of the General Statutes. Through the support of job coaches, dedicated staff and employers, people with disabilities are engaged in community employment, earning a wage and ultimately living more fulfilling and productive lives. I have seen first hand how important these job opportunities are to a person's development.

A young woman with a developmental disability was graduating from a private school that was segregated and we were told that she probably could not work in the community due to safety issues.

She was too trusting and open to people. She needed a special setting. A work site was located that would give her the natural supports and along with our agency supports she now has had a job in the community for over four years. She spoke at the Arc National Convention, is on the Board of Directors at the Arc, and attends Middlesex Community College at night. She is accomplishing her dreams.

An individual with Autism transitioning from high school had difficulty going through doorways, could not talk with people unless he knew them very well, even then it was difficult. He had a hard time leaving his house; would refuse to get out of the car. He tried several work sites and had difficulty adjusting to work. He began to work at the local YMCA with a job coach present at all times. The job coach worked with him to walk across the street to order lunch, to Dunkin Donuts to get a drink or donut. He gradually began to open up, to talk with his job coach, to talk with people at the Y. He became less dependent on the job coach. We connected him to Kennedy Center for travel training and he could travel independently. He now has a job at Flo Tech – a company that has a preferred purchase program. His job coach checks in with him periodically. He is learning to be independent and productive. He works three days per week, has great conversations with his co-workers, travels independently (changing buses to do so), volunteers at the YMCA, has a free membership and has many acquaintances in his community. He is proud of his accomplishments.

We should be very proud of the supported employment model embraced in Connecticut. We have recognized the value of developing work opportunities for people with disabilities in integrated community settings. Many of our clients move from supported employment settings to competitive employment, working directly for an employer. These work opportunities through the ARC of Meriden-Wallingford have changed the lives of hundreds of individuals we have served.

We hope you will continue to recognize this positive model of service and the vital role of community providers in facilitating these work opportunities. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Pauline Bouffard
Director of Employment Services
Arc of Meriden-Wallingford, Inc.
224-226 Cook Avenue
Meriden, CT 06450
(203)-237-9975