

Testimony
Human Services Committee
March 13, 2006

My name is Tom Fanning. I am the President/CEO of Ability Beyond Disability, a non-profit agency that provides services for people with disabilities funded through DMR, DMHAS and DSS in western Connecticut. We are headquartered at 4 Berkshire Boulevard in Bethel. I offer these comments in support of SB 1338.

Specifically, I ask that the Committee recommend a COLA increase of 7% for FY '08 and 5% for FY'09 for community-based, non-profit providers.

Over the past 30 years, I have been party to the beginnings of a community service network in Connecticut that was filled with hope and potential. I have watched the service system grow, largely through reliance upon the initiative of community-based non-profits. Now, sadly, over the past several years, I am watching it deteriorate.

For a long time, I was relatively certain that the non-profits were simply the victims of benign neglect. I was confident that one day the General Assembly would understand that our role was not only important but, as a practical matter, the only viable means of meeting the needs of Connecticut's citizens with disabilities. I was hopeful that the debate would move to focus on the needs of people. I am much less confident of that today.

I have seen funding of the non-profit sector determined not on the basis of need, nor of fairness. I have watched from one legislative session to the next as non-profits are bounced back and forth between "there is nothing left after we settle our contractual obligations" and "we'd like to help, but we are limited by the spending cap". I have watched in amazement as literally billions of dollars are appropriated and spent without a clear vision or plan or method of accountability. I have seen a willful (and unfair) allocation of dollars so that one person doing a job gets 50% more pay than another person who does the same (or more) work. I have seen special appropriations to cover State overages of energy costs at the same time as private non-profits are offered flat funding. I am incredulous as the DMR spends about as much in serving ¼ of its clients in the public sector as it does in funding services for ¾ in the private sector?

Now we are at a perilous point. Services are being discontinued. Waiting lists are growing. Staff positions are being held open because of lack of funding. Consumer "choice" is being replaced by available funds. Quality is being replaced with risk management. Do we need to wait until there is a crisis from which we may not be able to recover?

Has this been sound public policy? Is this what the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut wants? Can we shift the debate to "what is the best way to serve our most

vulnerable citizens?" Does the General Assembly have a plan if community-based, non-profit providers collapse?

I implore members of the Human Services Committee to take a stand for the community-based, non-profit provider community. As a Committee, recommend support of SB 1338: Recommend a COLA of 7% for FY '08 and 5% for '09. As individuals, please let your voices be heard in your caucuses. Speak on behalf of those we serve who have so little power but so much to lose. This isn't a partisan issue: this is a human issue.