

Human Services Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
March 13, 2007

SB 1338: COLA FOR PRIVATE PROVIDERS

My name is David Hadden. I am a member, and the former chair, of the Connecticut Council on Mental Retardation. We are a state-wide group of parents and advocates, representing a range of viewpoints. We are unanimous in our conviction that Connecticut must offer a material cost of living adjustment in its contracts with private provider agencies to care for our citizens with mental retardation. Please support SB 1338.

I am also the parent of a charming 26 year old man who was born with severe mental retardation. Jamie is blind, nonverbal, non-ambulatory, and needs help in all aspects of daily living. He has complex medical issues. Jamie is also very close to his mother, his sister and me, and to many of his dedicated caregivers and family. His smile lights up the room. His spirit reminds us of the essence of being human. Jamie lives in a group home managed by the Hartford Association for Retarded Citizens.

Connecticut depends on private provider agencies like HARC to serve more than 60% of our citizens with mental retardation. Most states fund and rely entirely on private agencies for these services. Reliance on the private sector is good business: it is both the most efficient and community based aspect of our service delivery system. Yet we are allowing this vital infrastructure to rust beyond repair.

Consider this: For the past twenty years, State contracts to private providers increased by 27.7%, while for the same period the consumer price index increased by 87.79% and the medical consumer price index increased by 164.51%. Private providers don't have cash reserves to counter these trends.

Consider this also: State employees doing the same direct care jobs as those in the private sector earn approximately 53% more than employees of private non-profit agencies. It is no wonder that private providers face unacceptably high staff turnover and vacancy rates.

But this isn't just a money issue. This is a safety and quality of care issue. It is frightening and deeply concerning to witness the private sector struggle to meet Jamie's complex needs. Our fears are not mere speculation. Six years ago our younger son, Sam, who had disabilities similar to those of Jamie, drowned in a bathtub due to the inattention of a caregiver.

These human beings for whom we are entrusted to care have challenging needs and challenging lives. Jamie receives thirteen different medications three times a day.

He cannot voice his needs. He and others like him require attentive caregivers who are paid a decent wage.

The Governor's budget takes a modest first step in the right direction in providing limited funding, but only for direct care wages paid by providers whose DMR rates are lower than other providers. Many private providers receive not a single dime under the Governor's budget. None of the private providers receive help on all those other costs beyond their control such as insurance, gasoline, heating and electric which hurt all our pockets.

We urge a 7% COLA in fiscal year 2008, and a 5% COLA in fiscal year 2009. It is good business. And it is an essential moral obligation to safeguard our vulnerable citizens with mental retardation.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to address any questions you might have.

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