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**TESTIMONY
Human Services Committee
CT. General Assembly
March 13, 2007**

My name is Patrick J. Johnson Jr. I am President of Oak Hill, the largest private non-profit provider of community based care for people with developmental disabilities in CT. with 110 sites in 58 towns. I am also a member of the Boards of the CT. Community Providers Association and the Non-Profit Cabinet.

I am here this afternoon to testify in support of raised bill number 1338, supporting a cost of living increase for private providers of health and human services. I have been appearing in this legislature for a quarter of a century advocating for cost of living adjustments for private non-profit agencies and every year we come away with an average 1.4% COLA for over twenty years. This is not just about money for wages and benefits, though our staff deserve decent pay and benefits. Chronic underfunding by the state is creating conditions that are not safe in our programs caused by staff working multiple jobs to cover their living expenses and turnover of staff resulting in a reduction in the quality of care. A few weeks ago shortly after the Governors budget was made public I met with over 70 of our 500 parents who were upset about zero and zero. Their primary question was, **WHY DOESN'T ANYONE CARE? Last Friday morning I attended a funeral for four members of one family where a father, who had been an advocate all his life for people with disabilities, murdered his wife, his two disabled children and then killed himself. We were horrified and everyone continues to ask the question, why would he do that?**

Another parent at the Mental Retardation Council Meeting last week mentioned that none of us should judge unless we've walked in the shoes of a parent with severely disabled children. I work with people with severe disabilities and their families and my colleague agencies in the community every day and after almost thirty years of administering services to people on the margins of our society I have never seen such desperation and the constant question **WHY DOESN'T ANYONE CARE?**

I don't need to tell you the difference between support for private agencies and public agencies. You know it is a glaring injustice and is creating a caste system of care in CT. If you were a parent and you saw 20 years of underfunding capped off by zero and zero for the next two years, a freeze on ICF-MR rates, a 2% cap on room and board rates, a waiver system that seems designed to get services for as many as possible for as little as possible, and now the potential rebidding of all state contracts including group homes; what would you do? Would you not be desperate?

I have another question in light of all the facts above. **WHY IS THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT WORKING TO PUT COMMUNITY BASED PRIVATE AGENCIES OUT OF BUSINESS?**

My brother-in-law lives in a group home. He celebrated his 58th birthday this weekend. He is totally blind, profoundly mentally retarded, and autistic. Every night at the supper table, his sister, my bride of 37 years, asks me that same haunting question, WHY DOESN'T ANYONE CARE? I know Senator Harris cares but we need the leadership, all of you, and the governor to care.

Please SHOW THAT YOU CARE and support bill 1338 and oppose rebidding group homes.

Respectfully submitted,

**Patrick J. Johnson Jr.
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