



A Connecticut Human Service & Community Development Agency

*Building safe, healthy, caring communities;
Inspiring people to reach their fullest potential as
productive and valued citizens.*

Human Services Committee Public Hearing

March 13, 2007

Bill Numbered

1338: AAC A Cost of Living Increase for Private Providers of Health and Human Services

By Mackenzie S. Tyson

Good afternoon honored members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Mackenzie Tyson and I am the Eddy Shelter Program Director for The Connection, Inc. The Connection, Inc. is a human service and community development agency that provides services in the areas of behavioral health, community justice, supportive housing and women and children's programming. We receive our primary funding from the state therefore, I am writing to support bills numbered 1338.

1338: AAC A Cost of Living Increase for Private Providers of Health and Human Services

I have worked for TCI for almost four years in a multitude of positions. In this time, TCI has had to come before the legislature every year to ask for an increase to bring us into parity with the State. The Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) is necessary to enhance wages and salaries, maintain benefits and meet the increasing costs of doing business.

Because of the diversity of our programs, we are funded through most state agencies, one of which was not mentioned, The Department of Correction. We run many programs funded through DOC and we have many staff working in those programs. The Eddy Center is one of those programs. During the time in which the Eddy Center has been a listed DOC halfway house/program, I have worked as a Client Service Aide as well as a Case Manager. During my time employed with TCI, directly under contract from DOC for the previous two years, I did not see one raise above the compulsory 3%. I have seen many staff who are passionate about their jobs and the work that they do, including myself, that have often been forced to have to consider other options for new employment, because we have to make decisions about what we can afford given our salaries and the current costs of living. I often wonder how our staff most with dependant families can make it through their day-to-day lives forced to live paycheck to paycheck because they are not being paid salaries that they deserve and that are in parity with the State. Our programs and subsequently the State of Connecticut, DOC, etc. are losing out on passionate employees who enjoy their jobs serving the various types of clients we see, attempting to change their individual lives as well as the overall health of our community. It is an unrealistic and unacceptable ideal that employees who are great in this field will simply stay in it regardless of pay. The truth is you can find a job anywhere but shouldn't we as a community with the common goals of seeing the clients we serve succeed and become citizens, make sure that those who admirably serve within Human Services are paid accordingly, have a career and continue to be the valued citizens who inspire others to reach their fullest potential.

We all try to be grateful for the 3% when we get it, but when we are all working our hardest to provide services to the state; it is hard to be so far behind the mark, all the time. We need to see a COLA of 7% in SFY08 and 5% SFY09. This does not make up for the under-funding that has plagued non-profits year after year, but it would make a significant difference to the staff in this agency, and others like ours. Without this COLA we may be forced to make cuts to services which not only affects the people who are working in our programs, which may be a handful of people, but what about the many people each one of them help? Now, there will be longer waiting lists, and people who have lost continuity in their care. This is not reasonable nor is it fair to those needing our services either.

This Committee will have an opportunity today and throughout the session, including in the forum the Committee has graciously agreed to host on March 29th, to hear directly from community based non-profit providers about the need for a 12% COLA over the biennium and the consequences of failing to meet that need. The nonprofits are the agencies that catch people who fall between the cracks; please do not deprive us of our ability to do that.

Please note that the COLA has historically been applied to the *Department of Correction and the Children's Trust Fund* and they are left out of the language in this bill. Please include them and pass this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Mackenzie Tyson

The Eddy Shelter

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