



Advocates for people with intellectual disabilities
and related developmental disabilities

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Testimony re:

H.B. #7280, "An Act Concerning Autism

and

**S.B. #1338, "An Act Concerning A Cost Of Living Increase For
Private Providers Of Health And Human Services**

Before the Committee on Human Service

March 13, 2007

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. I am Lynn Warner, the Executive Director of the Arc of Connecticut, a 54-year-old statewide advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. We have 23 local chapters throughout the State that provide supports, services, and advocacy for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

I am here today to testify on **H.B. #7280, "An Act Concerning Autism.**

We are, of course, pleased that in 2006, the Connecticut Legislature approved the pioneering autism services pilot program which provided supports for 25 adults with autism, but not intellectual disabilities/mental retardation, through The Department of Mental Retardation. To date the pilot is proving to be beneficial for the individuals receiving services. But this was ONLY a first step.

There are approximately 23,000 people living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) in Connecticut – with the appropriate supports, most adults with ASDs could live very productive and independent lives, including gainful employment. For taxpaying citizens of Connecticut – it is far less expensive to provide supports and services for job-coaching, life skills, and independent living opportunities than it is to maintain dependent citizens.

We encourage you to approve House Bill 7280, to provide a permanent funding stream for adults with ADSs. This would require the Commissioner of DSS in consultation with the Commissioner of DMR to

Formerly Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens (CARC)

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take all the necessary action to secure federal funding -- thus ensuring long-term funding of these services while having a minimal fiscal impact on the state – so nobody currently receiving services would have to go without or with less. In other words, the funding should be appropriated adequately to these individuals without reducing the funding from the other individuals receiving services from DMR.

COLA Increase for Private Providers of Health and Human Services

As you are well aware, the Governor has proposed no COLA funding in EITHER year for nonprofit provider agencies to meet the wage and benefit needs of their staffs or to cover administrative and other operating costs.

In effect, the employees of these agencies are being asked to continue to do very demanding work while taking a pay cut! This type of inequity and insecurity will only lead to private providers losing their highly trained staff members to the lure of better paying jobs – both in and out of the human services industry.

Additionally, often low pay in the private sector forces staff members to work overtime or take a second job in order to support themselves and their families. Fatigued employees are far more inclined to make mistakes or use poor judgment. *These circumstances are expensive, disheartening, and exhausting for Providers, but imagine the confusion, chaos, and highly disruptive environment it creates for the individuals they serve. Staff members become surrogate families and there is no continuity or stability in these individuals' lives when their "family" is continuously changing.*

Administratively, the cost of doing business continues to rise with health insurance, oil and fuel prices, liability insurance, and worker's compensation costs spiraling upwards and adding to the strain of budgets already spread too thin. With no COLA – agencies will be forced to cut services or even close...and where would that leave the people entrusted in their care?

We thank you for raising Bill #1338, and we urge you to vote favorably on it to insure the private sector can continue doing the outstanding work that it does for the vulnerable citizens of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding these very important issues.