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
Bills Numbered
1338: AAC A Cost of Living Increase for Private Providers of Health and Human Services
By Jake Villeneuve

Good afternoon honored members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Jake Villeneuve and I am a Programs 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 are funded primarily through state funding and am writing to support bill numbered 1338.

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

I have worked for TCI for more than nine years. And in that time we have 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 isn't mentioned, The Department of Correction. We run many programs funded through DOC and we have many staff working in those programs. Many of the staff haven't seen a raise beyond the obligatory 3% in years. We have many staff who are passionate about their job and the work that they do, but they are often forced to have to consider other options, because they have to make decisions about what they can afford. Due to low wages our staff are often forced to work several positions in order to afford rent or to pay a mortgage. Moreover, with the rising costs of utilities, heating, gas, insurance, day care, groceries, healthcare, etc....working for the nonprofits simply isn't practical. In addition, such realties contribute to excessive turnover as it is impractical for most to consider the non-profit provision of services a career. This is not fair to the good, talented, caring people who are employed in the non-profit sector.....nor is it fair to the clients served by such agencies.

These are productive programs that improve the quality of life in all our communities.

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's 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 doesn't 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 isn't fair to them 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 nonprofit 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 don't rob us of our ability to do that.

The measure of success in our State should be focused on enhancing the well being of those who have the least – rather than how many new millionaires, or billionaires, have made the Forbes list. Please help us do that. Help us to attract, develop, and retain talented and caring citizens of our State to provide services to those who need help and assistance to live healthy productive lives.

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.

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