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Please accept these comments regarding Raised Bill 1294 ~ An Act Concerning Fair Wages for Human Services Providers Contracting with the State.

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Catholic Charities is the largest private provider of social services in Fairfield County and we have a 90 year history of serving the needy and vulnerable regardless of faith tradition. We work with the poorest of the poor and in most cases we are the provider of last resort. Our clients are people challenged with all kinds of physical and mental disabilities. Our clients are hungry senior citizens who depend on us to bring them food each day. Our clients are broken families seeking a way to rebuild lives. Our clients are the homeless. Our clients are the hungry who come to our soup kitchens 365 days a year to seek food for themselves and their families. Our clients are frightened people struggling to recover from domestic violence. Our clients are the chronically mentally ill who seek safety, community and normalcy.

Please allow me to make 4 important points with respect to this proposed legislation.

- 1) First and foremost, we are committed to doing the work that we do and we put great effort into managing our resources to deliver a maximum return on investment. Our biggest expense is the compensation that goes to our employees and we gladly invest in our people, our most valuable resource and our most critical asset.
- 2) The proposed legislation describes a wage increase and includes a benefit package, yet there is no mechanism for the state to fund this legislation. Clearly if this is to move forward there needs to be a financial aspect, one that is tied to the legislation, not one that is dependent on the yearly budget process.
- 3) In the case of Catholic Charities, as it is in many of my peer agencies, we have multiple funding streams and not all of our employees would be covered by the terms of this legislation. However, to maintain morale and legally comply with rules regarding benefits, we would have to implement changes agency-wide. That would be a significant financial burden to shoulder in an environment where we already have to raise private dollars to cover 50% -60% of our operations.

4) This legislation seeks to “establish fair wages.” But what does fair wages mean? Each year at Catholic Charities we do an employee survey. It is an anonymous instrument and is a chance for staff at all levels to share thoughts, ideas and opinions. It is also an opportunity for us to gauge the satisfaction of our staff. Last year 100% of our employees said that they “found value and enjoyed the work that they did” and 91% of those employees felt they were compensated fairly. Our employees are competitive in the market and they understand that there may be more lucrative opportunities in the marketplace, yet the total employment package that we offer is what they choose. I am not suggesting that anyone on our staff would refuse a pay increase, but clearly this legislation addresses something that is not a problem in my company.

Clearly I have come before you today with more questions than answers. We are committed to working with the proponents of this legislation to ensure that we look at these questions and seek solutions so that there is no disruption in the services that our clients depend on so heavily. I speak for every person in my company when I say that seamless service delivery is a priority.

Thank you for your attention to these comments.