

Good morning Chairman Harris, Chairman Villano and member of the Human Services Committee. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a lobbyist for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 private and public employee members.

Council 4 AFSCME supports SB 413, AA Establishing a Community Provider Rescue Fund Account and Community-Based Services Commission.

This bill would make a substantial appropriation for state human services agencies, many of which are treating and caring for far more clients than their budgets allow. This bill would allow enough funding to give some much needed assistance to nonprofit human services workers.

Nonprofit human services workers make about 40% less in salary than state employees doing similar work. This is not because state employees are overpaid. It is because nonprofit human services workers are underpaid. They do some of the most important and sensitive work in our society. They care for needy children. They counsel adults with mental health and substance abuse treatment needs. They aid the homeless and hungry. They minister to those suffering from AIDS and spousal abuse. Lawmakers have told them that they do “God’s work” and so they do. Yet, they can barely afford to keep the roof over their own heads because the state and federal governments provide so little support for their wages. Many of them do not have health care or pensions for their old ages.

In the mid-1980’s the state recognized that teachers were paid too little. The Governor and the legislature passed the education enhancement act to provide a decent living for teachers so that they could stay in their jobs and provide an excellent and constant education system for Connecticut’s children. We urge Governor Rell and the state legislature to pass something akin to a “human services worker enhancement act” to allow human services workers to have a decent living and stay in the human services field. We urge lawmakers to allow these workers to enjoy a shot at the “American Dream” – to be able to own a house some day and to have enough income to send their children to college. A good start for this would be to pass a 9% COLAs in this year’s budget, and mandate it largely for worker pay, pension and health care.

Also if a commission is started we ask that, similar to the nonprofit association language, the executive directors of 1199 and Council 4 AFSCME be allowed to appoint two members each.

Thank you for your consideration.