

Bill 413

Senator Harris and Rep. Villano and members of the human service committee,

I am Pam Fields, Executive Director of the Arc of Meriden Wallingford and Board Member of CCPA. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on bill 413, An act establishing a Community Provider Rescue Fund.

This bill takes the huge step in addressing the present and long term needs of hundreds of Community Providers across the state that care for over 500,000 of Connecticut's citizens. These Providers, have been chronically underfunded for over 20 years. This chronic underfunding has eroded Connecticut's safety net and is placing many citizens in jeopardy. Most of the individuals that receive services under this system have been victimized in the past while living in institutional settings. Let's not continue to victimize them through lack of services

As our Agency partners with the state to continue to provide services to individuals with disabilities in our community, meeting critical needs and saving the state thousands of dollars, we are constantly, finagling resources, cutting services & cutting expenses in order to bridge the gap. Our agency has had to fundraise tens of thousands of dollars in order to balance our budget. We are one of the lowest wage providers in the state, with my Direct Support Staff starting at \$10.78 per hour. Since 2004 my agencies Workers Comp has increased 133%, insurance 99%, medical 42% and utilities 43%. During this time we have only received 9.25% in increases, as you can see there is no way to balance a budget with out making cuts. We try to be creative and bring on new business to spread the costs, sometimes that works well, and sometimes it just makes it worse.

I realize that for the most part I am preaching to the choir, however, I really do not want to be in the position of meeting with my employees to tell them there is no increase for them this year. Knowing that they have already lost money in their salary last year due to the increase in medical insurance costs. Once that news is given I am sure I will hear from several staff that they are actively looking for another job. I will again hear the lines, I love working with the Arc, I love the individuals I serve, but I cannot afford my rent and I need more income. AND worse yet, I will hear from some of the individuals extremely upset by the loss of their care giver.

With the economy in the position it is, I feel it is critical for Connecticut to spend its money wisely, funding the community providers is a wise choice.

-  The community is where the citizens live,
-  The community is where the citizens go for help,
-  The community provider was created by the citizens in their community to meet their needs.
-  The budget is to address the needs of Connecticut and its citizens.

THE SOLUTION SEEMS EASY TO ME.

**SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY PROVIDER RESCUE FUND AND LET ME STAY
IN MERIDEN AND CONCENTRATE ON IMPROVING SERVICES TO PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES, INSTEAD OF JOINING PAT JOHNSON UP HERE EACH
YEAR WITH OUR TIN CUPS.**