



Advocates for people with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities

43 Woodland Street, Suite 260, Hartford, CT 06105

Telephone: 860-246-6400 Facsimile: 860-246-6406

Website: www.arcct.com

President
Ken Cholewinski
SARAH Seneca
Guilford

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March 5th, 2008

Testimony before the Public Health Committee

Re: Testimony for SB 575, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TASK FORCE TO STUDY DAY PROGRAM SERVICES OFFERED THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

By

Leslie Simoes, Assistant Executive Director, The Arc of Connecticut

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Leslie Simoes and I am the new Assistant Executive Director for The ARC of Connecticut, a 56-year-old statewide advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. We have 23 local chapters that provide supports, services, and advocacy for individuals with intellectual disabilities throughout Connecticut.

I am testifying today in support of **SB 575 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF a TASK FORCE TO STUDY DAY PROGRAM SERVICES OFFERED THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES.** This bill is an important step to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities in our state. There is a movement led by self advocates, advocates and providers to move away from day services for people with disabilities and into creative support services and competitive employment. This bill would create a task force with advocates, self advocates, providers, labor unions, trade associations, parent groups and DDS representatives to work together to study the day service system. The Arc of Connecticut is initiating this legislation and will be a part of the solution moving forward.

Formerly Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens (CARC)

The Arc/Connecticut, Inc. Member Chapters: Futures, Inc., Middletown / Greater Enfield Arc / Family Options, Watertown / Arc of Farmington Valley / Friends of New Milford, Inc. / Litchfield County Arc / LOV-Arc, Westbrook / MARC, Inc., Manchester / MARC: Community Resources, Portland / Arc of Meriden-Wallingford / Arc of Greater New Haven / Arc/New London County / Options, Unlimited / Arc of Plainville / Arc of Quinebaug Valley / SARAH Inc., Guilford / SARAH Seneca Residential Services / SARAH Tuxis Residential Services / STAR, Norwalk / Arc of Southington / Tri County Arc, Columbia / Waterbury Arc / WeCAHR, Danbury

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To quote Chad Sinanian, my friend and leader in the self advocacy movement nationally and in Connecticut "No more chump change". This slogan represents the feelings of people with disabilities being undervalued members of society. We often define ourselves by the work we do, the respect we receive as a result of the work and compensation we live on and this is no different for people with disabilities. Programs called sheltered workshops which pay individual pennies based on how many nuts or bolts they put into a box only to be dumped out at the end of the day is outdated. Being compensated at sub minimum wages just because a person has a disability is not acceptable anymore and worse yet, there are capable individuals who do nothing all day but hang around in staffed environments; they call it "Day Service Options". These individuals can not take pride in these jobs. As a state we need to look for alternative ways for people with disabilities to become fully participating members of the workforce. Too often the talents of these individuals are overlooked and undervalued.

That being said, these sheltered workshops, sub-minimum wage jobs or day service options are sometimes the only option for families needing respite or needing to work during the day and these programs do provide a safe environment for these individuals. The point of this bill is to not just close these programs but to study what services exist, what funding streams are available and how to create more employment opportunities and more appropriate day service options for people with disabilities. Closing these programs before alternative services are available would not be in the best interest of these individuals and is not the intention of this bill.

You already heard from Bill Berry describe what it was like working in a sheltered workshop and why we need to look for better opportunities for people with disabilities. If you listen to anything about this bill today, please listen to what Bill has to say and let's take this step in providing valuable, appropriate, and competitive support and service opportunities for people with disabilities in Connecticut.

Thank you.