

Testimony on HB 6609 (Community Provider Rescue Fund) and SB 843

Good morning Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Tom Fanning. I am President of Ability Beyond Disability, a non profit provider that has been serving people with disabilities in Connecticut for 55 years.

I am here today to offer comments on two related matters, HB 6609, an attempt to address the overall inadequacy of funding for the private, non profit community and a provision of SB 843 that would freeze rates for Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded.

The inadequacy of funding for the private non profit sector has a history of more than 25 years , during which the State has been turning to us to meet the needs of people with disabilities and then turning away from us when it came time to pay for those services. Over the years, you have heard of the need for a COLA increase, for funds to sustain our infrastructure and for a Rescue Fund. Call it what you will, but you have to come to grips with the fact that those most deserving of State support are in peril because of years of inadequate funding. In spite of these frighteningly challenging times, the State needs to find funding for nonprofits...we are the organizations that provide the services to the most fragile among us. Again, call it what you will, but please look at the system and put the dollars where they are needed. Support the Community Provider Rescue Fund.

The second matter I wish to discuss is a subset of the first. Freezing the rates of Intermediate Care Facilities for the Mentally Retarded will have a devastating impact on the care of some of the most fragile people with developmental disabilities. ICFs/MR are group homes licensed by DDS, certified by DPH and funded by DSS. These homes typically serve people who have intense care needs.

On December 11 last year, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee published a comprehensive report that details the challenges CT faces as our citizens with developmental disabilities live longer. Not only are people living longer...they develop other complications related to aging at an earlier age than the general population...notably Alzheimer's Disease but also other age related conditions such as diabetes, heart problems, the need for personal care and assistance in getting around.

Ability Beyond Disability operates 20 ICFs/MR serving 118 people. The needs of the people who live in these homes are changing dramatically as a direct reflection of the aging of people with disabilities. The people who live in these homes are not a stagnant population. Medical needs are increasing daily. The needs for behavioral supports are increasing. Each new referral is more complex than the last one. We have been grateful to the Department of Social Services for recognizing this trend and providing relief when possible but if the rates of the ICFs/MR are frozen for 2 more years, it will absolutely put the well-being of these people at risk. If section 16 of SB 843 is not amended: I fear that the lives of our aging residents of ICFs/MR homes will literally be put in danger.

Thank you for listening. Please hear us.