

December 9, 2009

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony
Carrie Kramer, Director of Brain Injury Services
Brain Injury Association of Connecticut

Good evening Chairperson and Members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carrie Kramer. I provide you this testimony as a family member of a brain injury survivor, as the Director of Brain Injury Services at the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut (BIAC), as a member of the Connecticut Concussion Task Force, AND as a voice that represents the thousands of Connecticut residents, including Veterans, who seek assistance from us.

Each year, more than 1.5 million Americans sustain a traumatic brain injury. In Connecticut alone, the average is 22 people every day — 8,000 every year. Brain injury is now the leading cause of death and disability in children and young adults, and it is the “signature injury” of the Iraq/Afghanistan war, with an estimated 10% of those who have served returning home with some level of brain injury requiring some level of assistance.

Let me provide a snapshot of those BIAC has helped recently.

- We connected a young woman coming out of prison with the brain injury resources available in her community.
- We assisted a veteran who is not only homeless but severely challenged by a brain injury, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and substance use by connecting him to the diverse services he desperately needs.
- We referred a parent whose young child cannot return to school because of post-concussion syndrome to a capable medical provider prepared to offer appropriate treatment.
- And we linked a brain injury survivor also suffering from psychiatric illness to her local mental health authority for comprehensive therapy.

There are countless other stories to share, but if the legislature does not continue funding to the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut, BIAC will come to end — and with it, successes like these, because BIAC is now and always has been the “go to” organization for Connecticut’s brain injury survivors, family members, caregivers, and professionals.

For over 25 years, BIAC has been the only organization in Connecticut that provides information, resources and support for individuals with brain injuries, their families, caregivers, and the professionals who serve them. Simply put, no one else does what we do — and that includes the Department of Social Services, which actually contracts with BIAC to provide the critical services that DSS does not.

For example, BIAC:

- Operates the toll-free Helpline that is the State's only mechanism for receiving, handling and tracking inquiries from brain injury survivors and families — and which has experienced a 600% increase in calls in just the last three years.
- Sponsors 29 well-organized — and very active — support groups throughout the state.
- Teaches students throughout Connecticut about the realities of brain injury and how to prevent them.
- Educates many of the key State agencies — including the Departments of Social Services, Correction, Developmental Disabilities Services, Children & Families, Education, and Veteran Affairs — about brain injury so that their clients with brain injuries are appropriately identified and effectively served.

As medicine advances, more people survive their brain injuries — and as more people survive their brain injuries, more people need help. In fact, in the time it has taken to hold this evening's hearing, as many as 10 more of Connecticut residents will have sustained a traumatic brain injury. A brain injury could happen to any of us here...while walking to our cars...on the drive home...climbing the steps to our front door...taking that long-awaited hot shower. Young or old, rich or poor, male or female, each of us is at risk every day.

Thankfully, whenever someone affected by brain injury has needed help, BIAC has always been there. To ensure that BIAC always is, please remove our modest operating grant funding from line 66 of Governor Rell's most recent Deficit Mitigation Proposal and protect it from the threat of elimination going forward.

Thank you.