



Oak Hill

Since 1893, services
& solutions for people
with disabilities.

TESTIMONY

December 9, 2009

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Re: Deficit Mitigation

- Eleanor A. Brooks
Blindness Related -
Supports Center at
Oak Hill
- The Hartford Artisans'
Center at Oak Hill
- Individual and Family
Supports Center at
Oak Hill
- The NEAT Center
at Oak Hill
- Oak Hill Birth to
Three Program
- Oak Hill Camp
- Oak Hill Center for
Relationship & Sexuality
Education
- Oak Hill Day Services
- Oak Hill Foundation, Inc.
- Oak Hill Professional
Development
- Oak Hill Residential
Services
- Oak Hill School

Good afternoon! My name is Patrick Johnson and I am President of Oak Hill. Oak Hill provides services to people with multiple and severe disabilities, primarily developmental disabilities in over 100 sites in 58 towns throughout CT. I am here today to express on behalf of those we serve, who for the most part cannot speak for themselves, my profound concern for the future of services for people with disabilities. Those with severe disabilities, mental illness, the hungry and homeless must be a priority.

There has been much talk among economists, pundits, and political leaders about the "new normal" where everyone has to do with less. The problem we face in the community based non-profit human service community is that there is nothing new for us with the "new normal." Inadequate revenue, chronic underfunding, and doing more with less has been our stock in trade for over 20 years with state contracts averaging less than one percent per year increase and now three years of zero and possibly cuts. Over the past six months we notified over 400 of our staff that their hours were being reduced and as a result about 22 of them lost their health benefits, which incidentally is going up double digits and now cost us over \$16,000 per year per family for coverage. We eliminated 23 positions and 47 were moved from full to part time. Most of my staff are already working two jobs to make ends meet and have never had a raise equal to or exceeding the CPI in over 20 years. We were recently asked by the state to add staff to one of our ICF/MR houses because we did not appear to have adequate staff to evacuate the six severely disabled residents safely in case of fire. DSS supports this request which is now awaiting a decision in OPM. At the same time the Governor has recommended that you cut 2% (4% in the next six months) from ICF/MR facilities. Our ICF/MR facilities are small group homes in the community with six or fewer residents who require enhanced nursing and other medical related care because of their complex medical needs and severity of their disability. We have 16 such sites and each one is treated as if it were a mini skilled nursing facility for funding purposes. This cut will cost us almost \$400,000 this FY. We are already in deficit in this program to the tune of \$920,000. If I cut nurse's wages, (They are already below market.) they will leave and we are required by law and regulation to assure safety and adequate care. Where does that leave me? Turning these programs back to the state will cost you even more, but it may be all I'm left with. Cuts to ICF's result in the loss of federal revenue as well. It makes no sense.

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It seems to me that at times like these all of us as leaders must examine our core values and make decisions about priorities. One of the most profound moral questions that all of us who have more need to ask ourselves is: Because I have what I have; who has less? Or expressed another way; at what expense to others do I have what I have? As I reflect on the cuts that fall disproportionately on the disabled, the poor, and the ill I am reminded of Dickens Christmas Carol. Marley was indeed right when he told Scrooge; "Mankind was my business! The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance and benevolence, were all my business. Marley lost his opportunity "to interfere, for good in human matters." Please legislators do not lose yours. Do not balance Connecticut's economic problems on the backs for the poorest and weakest in our society. The ghost of Christmas Future awaits us all. While we can do good, we must.

Patrick J. Johnson Jr.

President of Ct. Institute for the Blind Inc. dba Oak Hill