

Testimony Re: Residential Board & Care Funds 2/11//2010

To the Honorable Co-Chairs and Members of the Appropriations
Subcommittee on Human Services

My name is Margaret W. Nareff, Executive Director of The Shelter for Women, a 121-year old organization that provides residential treatment for adolescent girls in two facilities, one in Hartford and one in Manchester. I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony to you regarding proposed cuts to residential board & care funds for the Department of Children & Families.

As co-chair of AEGIS for CT Nonprofits, I represent scores of private providers across the state that care for children in state custody and I am in good company when I tell you that my colleagues and I would like nothing better than to work ourselves into extinction. However, the fact of the matter is that some of the most fragile children in our state must be removed from their homes and communities to be treated until such time as they can function safely and in good health. Residential care should never be a way of life, but it should be available when these children need it. Although the number of children in congregate settings has declined significantly during the last two years, there remains a need for programs like mine.

We applaud DCF's strategic goals of placing children in the lowest level of care possible and keeping families intact whenever possible. We also wish to work collaboratively with the Department to "right size" the system of care so that there are appropriate levels of care along a continuum. While we never wish to be an ongoing way of life for children, residential providers *do* need to continue to be part of the continuum so that, when needed, we are present to provide the safe care and treatment these children require and that cannot be obtained in home or community settings. At The Shelter for Women our average length of stay in residential treatment is now only about 8 months and most clients are discharged to a lower level of care or to families, thus meeting goals that DCF has set for providers like Gray Lodge.

In reducing the board and care funding there is significant risk that providers like The Shelter for Women will not be available when children need these services. Board and care should not become the pot from which everyone draws to fill other needs.

Many of us are operating barely above subsistence level, with rates that have been frozen or reduced during the last several years. Gray Lodge, the Hartford residential treatment center operated by The Shelter for Women, receives a daily rate that is almost \$50 less than the cost of daily treatment per client. My organization is mindful of our obligation not to rely on state funding alone and is fortunate to have scores of generous donors who contribute almost 13% of our annual operating expenses to support treatment. But funding shortfalls cause providers like us to deplete our resources at an alarming rate.

We do not expect the state to pay the full cost of operating, but we are being slowly starved and risk closing if solutions are not found. Providers have been informed that, currently, capacity exceeds utilization. We wish to work proactively with the Department, the legislature and our trade associations to effectively match need to capacity, using available cash resources wisely. We can do this only if we remain in business and at the table in discussions to find solutions.

Providers like us rely on state funding to be there, as we are there for these vulnerable children when we are needed. If board and care funds are reduced or drawn off the fill other gaps in the absence of careful planning, there is the very real possibility that children most at risk and in need of residential treatment will not receive it. Some providers have closed already and others are in danger of closing. If this occurs more children will inevitably be sent out of state for the treatment they need. Residential providers must be funded at levels that ensure children in our state will remain here and will receive care when they need it.

Thank you.