



TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
February 18, 2010

To the Members of the Appropriations Committee:

To paraphrase a famous quote from a past election campaign -"It's all about the economy...."and for us, it's all about jobs.

My name is Pat Bourne and I am the Executive Director of SARAH, Inc. We are a family founded, non-profit agency that provides work and life skills training and other community based supports and services for over 500 children and adults with intellectual and other disabilities throughout southern and eastern Connecticut. Yes, another community provider.

But do you know that collectively, the SARAH family of agencies employs over 400 people? We are one of the largest employers in the greater shoreline. As a service provider, SARAH, Inc. supports over 150 workers in retail, manufacturing and service jobs throughout the community. Every day, hundreds of adults and their families rely on SARAH for transportation to and from their jobs, their work training classes and their day programs. Dozens of businesses rely on SARAH supported workers every day.

Who are these supported workers? Let me tell you about the "A Team". The "A Team" is a crew of 4 people who happen to have an intellectual disability. They work at a local manufacturing plant folding, counting, and assembling the many items that are shipped from the company's warehouse. They are hard workers, perform productive and satisfying work, earn a paycheck and are active members of their communities. They begin their workday just like everyone else. They commute to work, but they travel together with a job coach and in a van provided by SARAH.

Despite decades of chronic underfunding, SARAH and other community providers were both grateful and relieved that we were "flat funded" in the initial state budget. Like other businesses, we are facing escalating costs. Since the budget was passed, the cost of our employee health benefits increased over 25%. Unlike other businesses, we cannot raise our prices.

Even worse, the Governor's budget mitigation plan has cut over \$3.5 million from Supported Employment and Day Support programs like SARAH. As a result, the Department of Developmental Services has implemented drastic changes in reimbursement to day program providers. While our fixed costs increase, our funding will not only decrease but will fluctuate greatly from month to month. We have already eliminated positions and have frozen vacancies. Because of these and other funding cuts, our clients who rely on these services every day and the people who provide these services are losing their jobs. These cuts are a short-term fix with significant long term costs. How is that good for Connecticut and its economy?

I have great respect for the legislative process. I do not envy the legislators who are faced with choosing competing agendas, but this is not a competition....

Connecticut's community providers are not in competition with business. We are a business and a major employer.

Connecticut's community providers are not in competition with towns and cities. We and the people we serve live in these same towns and cities and rely on those services as well.

Connecticut's community providers are not in competition with health care. We struggle everyday to find a way to provide affordable and accessible health benefits for our employees.

This is not an issue of who is "most deserving". This is not an issue of "survival of the fittest" – it is an issue of survival itself.

The State of Connecticut has asked us and relies on us to provide this most valuable service. By all accounts, we have met our part of that bargain and have done our job well. The state now has a responsibility to fund these services adequately and appropriately so we can continue to keep people and our economy working. SARA and the community provider system are not the problem – we are the solution! Please restore funding and allow us to continue what we do so well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Bourne". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Patricia Bourne,  
Executive Director

SARA, Inc.

203-458-4040, ext. 311

[pbourne@sarah-inc.org](mailto:pbourne@sarah-inc.org)

[www.sarah-inc.org](http://www.sarah-inc.org)