

My name is Timothy Coleman; I work for the Department Of Developmental Services in the Norwich area. . I have been employed by the agency for approximately twenty five years. The house I supervise has eight residents all with challenging behaviors. We also provide Respite services for one gentleman, Monday – Friday because his mother is a single parent and works a full time job. All the residents at this home have resided there over twenty seven years together. The residential staffs providing services have longevity as well, some providing care for well over twenty five years.

I am, by no means, a public speaker however; I felt so compelled to testify tonight because I am appalled with lack of compassion this administration is displaying. Residents are being auctioned to the lowest bidders, moving throughout the state of Connecticut like cattle. Residents are forced to move, regardless of what obstacles may arise. Example: A five bed group home in the North is being closed. One client, who had resided there, has life threatening SIB (self abusive behavior) and was being treated closely by a Neuro Psychiatrist. Since the move, this client is no longer being followed by this Neuro Psychiatrist as it was deemed to be too expensive. The treating physician warned the agency of the ramifications of moving this individual, all to no avail. This is just one example of the unspeakable acts of this administration.

The public sector staff has many resources which allows quality care to the residents. The public sector provides care to the most complex population. Most private agencies are not equipped to handle the, behaviorally challenged or medically involved. Besides Residential services we also provide on staff Psychologists, Speech Therapists, Physical Therapists, Occupational Services, Nursing, Dietary, Audiology, and Dental which saves the tax payers a tremendous amount of money. The public sector does not have the ability to pick and choose which residents they would like to provided care for. No is never an option, because the public sector are the most trained and educated. For some individuals the public sector facilities are the only placement to provide the appropriate care to maintain their health and safety.

Some of our residents receive vocational services from the private sector. My experiences with the private sector have been frustrating because they have such a high turnover of staff. At some places it is almost like a revolving door with staff turnover. I am to assume the turnover is attributed to the low wages, poor medical insurance, minimal training, high ratio of client to staff, no retirement packages, and overall an environment which Is not conducive to quality of care.

The cuts which the public sector are forced to deal with are beyond ridiculous. Example: House supervisors are now purchasing all office supplies with their own money as the agency will not approve day-to- day items. Clinical staff are being denied mileage reimbursement, case loads have doubled, homes may possibly, loose vital vehicles, and the list is becoming endless.

The public sector staff has attempted to explain the seriousness of the situation by conducting meetings with legislators, conducting rallies, speaking with the press, all to no avail. I have personally met with the Commissioner of DDS and the Attorney General, spoken to the press, attended many rallies, and have spoken to many legislators. All these attempts have failed. No one appears to be listening. The voices of the most innocent are being ignored. Does anyone care what is happening to the most vulnerable?

The Governor and her administration would like the residents of Connecticut to believe state employees are part of the blame for the large deficits which currently exist. The furlough days which all state employees are being forced to use is the most wasteful of all. Had the administration kept all furlough days to non-essential staff, cost savings may have been tremendous. In DDS alone, all essential staff uses furlough day, and they are replaced with time and a half overtime. Imagine how much money these furlough days are costing the citizens of Connecticut.

Approximately seventeen DDS public homes have been affected with closings or privatization so far. Countless residents have been ripped away from loved ones. Budgets have been slashed. Client care has been compromised. Parents and family are forced to watch their loved ones suffer. Staff feel helpless and frustrated.

The most despicable of all is watching the clients decline with each move. Imagine for one minute returning home from work and being asked by a loved one to pack your bags. Imagine your family stating, you are moving to another home where you will have a new family. Your brothers and sisters will be moving someplace else. Everyone you know will be moving out tomorrow. Now attempt to understand this with a disability. Waking up the following morning in a new house, new family, new brothers and sisters. This occurs daily!

I realize the state has tough decision to make during this tough economic recession however; I implore you not to reduce the deficit at the expense of the most helpless population. Take a stand and protect the rights of the disabled. Tell the Governor and her administration enough is enough. Is anyone listening? Does anyone ever care?

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Timothy Coleman