

TESTIMONY---March 5, 2010

Appropriations Committee

CT General Assembly

Re. SB 355

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Patrick Johnson and I am President of Oak Hill, a private non-profit community based agency with over 100 facilities in 58 towns throughout the state of CT providing services to people with multiple and severe disabilities, particularly developmental disabilities. Because the state of CT is our primary funding source and the vast majority of our clients are in the care of the Commissioner of Development Services we are increasingly concerned about our capacity to maintain safety and quality care but also maintain the community living arrangements (a.k.a. group homes) for our clients. **Most important of all, these are people's homes!**

Many of our group homes in the community were opened as Mansfield Training School was closing about 25 to 30 years ago. We have maintained our properties well but roofs are aging as are mechanical systems and until recently we were able to amortize our major capital expenses for essential significant repairs by obtaining three bids, submitting our proposals to the DDS and DSS for approval and prior authorization as well as confirmation of value. We would then front the cost of the immediate repair from our own resources and the cost was then built into the room and board fair rent rate and spread over the anticipated life of the repair, i.e. 20 to 30 years for a roof for example so we could recover our cost.

Now we are confronting a very challenging time where we can go through this process and even have projects approved but cannot proceed because we have no way to recover the cost. Think about our own homes with a roof that needs replacement or a furnace that no longer works or major building modifications to accommodate the needs of a disabled family member with the ability to borrow to meet the emergency but no way to capture revenue to repay cost. Obviously a temporary patch can work for a period of time on a roof but furnace replacement and other needs cannot be delayed. My parents used to say "a stitch in time saves nine." Not maintaining our buildings in good repair will cost even more later when roof leaks lead to mold problems and damaged ceilings and worse.

I urge you to approve SB 355 and ask that you please consider other state agencies that fund community based group homes in addition to DDS and also please extend this beyond June of next year. Roofs will still leak and old mechanical systems will still fail in 2012. We are very grateful to DDS and DSS for their support in these matters over the years and ask that you please untie their hands to assure safe comfortable living environments for our most vulnerable citizens. Thank you for your kindness and consideration!!

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick J. Johnson Jr.

President of Oak Hill & Chairman of CCPA & CoChair of the Non Profit Human Services Cabinet.