February 23,2010

To: The Human Services Committee

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, Senator Coleman, Senator Kane, Representative Abercrombie, Representative Thompson, Representative Butler, Representative Cook, Representative Flexer, Representative Holder-Winfield, Representative Orange, Representative Jarmoc, Representative Lyddy , Representative Morris, Representative Rigby, Representative Gibbons, Representative Chapin, Representative Coutu

Re: S.B. 32 An Act Implementing the Governor's Recommendations Concerning Social Services - Commission On the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI)

My name is Diane M. Wixted. I am a resident of Glastonbury CT. I am the former Supervisor of Counseling Services for the Commission On the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. I retired in July '09 under the Retirement Incentive Program, after 31 years of service at CDHI.

I am writing in opposition to the Governor's budget proposal which merges the Commission On the Deaf and Hearing Impaired into the Department of Social Services (DSS). Simply, this would not be a good fit, nor would it serve the consumers well.

CDHI is the state agency dedicated to serving the unique communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing people and their families through its' direct services. CDHI's mission is totally different than the mission of DSS, which focuses primarily on entitlement programs and income assistance. DSS has difficulty managing the programs it administers now, let alone adding new responsibilities to it's mandate.

Although DSS is viewed by the administration as THE disability agency for the state, it is not recognized by the deaf and hard of hearing community or by people with disabilities as such.

Proposals for CDHI to merge with other state agencies have been put forward periodically since 1995. At that time, the Hull/Harper Commission proposed merging all of the state agencies serving people with disabilities into one agency. No action was taken on this idea. This type of re-organization could be explored again as an alternate option. It would be more suitable and make more sense to combine agencies with similar missions, consumer populations and service delivery systems.

About 5 years ago, the Governor /OPM proposed the same merger that they are proposing now - CDHI to DSS. The action taken was to place CDHI's administrative functions – business and personnel operations into The Department of Administrative Services (DAS). DAS absorbed the CDHI Business Officer position into its' staff, and placed a DAS- funded Junior Accountant at CDHI to handle the billing for interpreting services.

CDHI has suffered tremendous erosion in programs and services since 1991 due to budgets cuts/ no refills on vacated positions.

IN 1991, CDHI had 19 full-time positions. Currently, I believe it has incumbents in 8 full-time positions.

The Governor is currently proposing funding for 5 full-time General Fund positions. Although not mentioned in the Governor's proposal, the agency has historically received Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funding – which funded the Supervisor of Counseling position, a clerk-typist position and miscellaneous non-reimbursable interpreting situations like community education forums.

If CDHI is merged, budget savings would be in administrative personnel costs and possibly in rental costs. Eliminating the Executive Director's position would yield approximately $95,000; eliminating the Executive Secretary's position would yield about $60,000.

Depending on the current property lease agreement, which was recently under negotiation, a relocation or co-location with another state entity could yield about $75,000 per year (less the initial costs of moving in the first year).

I recognize that you are charged with finding ways to assist in resolving the state budget crisis. I ask that you carefully consider the consequences of the proposed merger of CDHI into DSS, and explore alternative configurations. I believe the Governor's proposed merger would be a disservice to the deaf and hard of hearing community and would further marginalize and disenfranchise them.

Please contact me if I can be of any assistance in this matter.

Best Regards,

Diane M. Wixted

860-967-7151

diane.wixted@yahoo.com