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Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony
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Good evening Chairpersons Walker, Harp, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Julie Peters, and I am the Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut. I am here this evening, as I have been many times before, to ask for your support in maintaining funding in the DSS budget for the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut. The Governor's budget recommendation is to eliminate the entire operating grant (currently $126,342) provided to BIAC each year, labeling the grant "advocacy" funding. The truth is that we have been contracted by this state for over 27 years to provide services which the state does not have the capacity to provide.

The Department of Public Health estimates that more than 8,000 CT residents will sustain a brain injury each year. Traumatic brain injuries now disable more people each year than spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, HIV/AIDS, and breast cancer combined — six *times more!* Many of those individuals and their families will need assistance with the long and complex process of rebuilding their lives. Who provides that assistance? The Brain Injury Association of Connecticut.

While Connecticut's Department of Social Services provides case management for the less than 400 brain injury survivors on the Medicaid ABI Waiver, it is BIAC who provides information, resources, and support for everyone else with brain injuries — as well as their families, caregivers, and the professionals who serve them. It is BIAC that has done so for the past 29 years. Here is what that means.

Having no mechanism for receiving, handling, and tracking inquiries from brain injury survivors and family members, DSS officially contracts with BIAC to operate a toll-free Helpline — a Helpline that has seen a 600% increase in calls in the last five years. This past year, BIAC responded to more than 4000 contacts. But that is not all we do.

We also sponsor 30 support groups statewide, including three just for combat veterans. We educate state agencies on brain injury, including the Departments of Social Services, Correction, Developmental Disabilities, Children & Families, Education, and Veteran Affairs, to assure that all those who are working with an individual with a brain injury understand the issues they face. In the process, we have helped to foster greater collaboration between these agencies, so that individuals are better identified and served.

In fact, the services we offer are so comprehensive that when DSS initiated a public awareness campaign on brain injury, the phone number DSS listed on their billboards and signs was not theirs. ***It was ours.***

Years ago, most serious brain injuries were fatal. Thanks to modern medicine, that has changed. However, medicine is not able to restore "life as they knew it" to those who survive or to their loved ones. Even BIAC cannot to do that — but we can and do provide brain injury survivors and their families with the ongoing support and resources needed to optimize recovery, and that makes the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut a genuinely critical lifeline on what is always a very long and difficult journey back.

Tonight you will hear from many of those we have served in a variety of capacities. Please listen to their stories, as they can describe far better than I could just how important the work we do is. And we do all this with very limited funding from the State.

Ladies and gentlemen, the bottom line is this: With BIAC the State's *de facto* resource for brain injury services, eliminating BIAC's operating grant will devastate the delivery of services and supports to thousands of Connecticut residents whose lives have been shattered by the experience of brain injury — and that really *is* something the State will not be able to afford. I ask that you immediately remove the BIAC operating grant from the list of proposed budget cuts and protect both the grant and those we serve - in the months and years to come. I thank you.