

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
Friday, March 4, 2011

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TESTIMONY Of

Jim Tackett

On The

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

FY 2001-2012 BUDGET

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Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Jim Tackett. I am a Veteran who has served in leadership roles within the federal VA as well as a state agency. Most recently, I served as a faculty member for the National Returning Veterans Policy Academy sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. I need to clearly state at the outset that I am offering testimony today as a private citizen who is a Veteran and not as a government employee. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Governor's Proposed Budget as it pertains to the Department of Social Services and, more specifically, to the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut.

As you know, the signature weapon of insurgents in both Iraq and Afghanistan involve bomb blast. Improvised explosive devices, rocket propelled grenades and suicide bombers are a few of the methods of delivery of such blasts. The Army has reported that nearly 70% of all WIA's (service members wounded in action) during Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and New Dawn are caused by bomb blast. In April 2008 a RAND Corporation Study reported that as many as 19%, or 320,000, of Afghanistan and Iraq War Veterans may return with traumatic brain injuries.

In response, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs established 4 national *Poly Trauma Centers* (VA, FL, MN, CA) that provide "intensive rehabilitative care to Veterans and Service Members who experience injuries (including brain injuries) to more than one organ system". VA also established *Poly Trauma Network Sites* in each of its 22 health care regions that provide "continued medical care and rehabilitation services for Veterans following their discharge from a national *Poly Trauma Center*" (VA web-site). VA has no such facilities in Connecticut. While the VA Connecticut Healthcare System does have a Poly Trauma Unit, it does not provide ongoing rehabilitative services for TBI. If a Veteran or Service Member requires acute care or ongoing rehabilitative care for a TBI they must go out-of-state.

Connecticut is home to a rich array of residential and outpatient treatment and rehabilitative services for individuals diagnosed with TBI. Current regulations that govern VA's Fee Basis Program would allow VA to purchase services directly from Connecticut providers when it is

determined that a Veteran in their care requires a level of care or service that the VA does not provide. But VA clinicians are currently unaware of the wealth of TBI treatment and rehabilitative options available to Veterans right here in Connecticut.

The Brain Injury Association of CT has stepped in to help bridge this awareness gap. BIACT has received funding to develop a comprehensive web-based list of Connecticut TBI Providers that will include provider contact information, location, hours of service, patient target populations, funding mechanisms, as well as detailed information regarding services and levels of care. Once completed, VA may begin to authorize Veterans' local access to TBI treatment and rehabilitative services thereby eliminating the hardship of requiring Veterans and their families to travel to an out-of-state VA facility.

Additionally, BIACT currently leads a statewide Veterans TBI Work Group that is focused on assuring that Connecticut Veterans with TBI and their families receive the treatment, rehabilitative and supportive services that they need. In partnership with VA Vet Centers, BIACT has already established support groups for Veterans and their families throughout the state.

BIACT provides critically important services to our citizens and their families who struggle with the consequences of TBI. Focusing attention on the needs of Veterans, this organization now provides leadership that strengthens our collective ability to assist wounded Veterans and their families to excellence in their lives following their experience in war. I urge you to restore funding in the Dept of Social Services budget so that BIACT may continue this important work. Thank you.

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