

February 26, 2013

Human Services Committee Public Hearing Testimony

Julie Peters

Executive Director,

Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut

My name is Julie Peters, and I am the Executive Director of the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony in regard to [H.B. No. 6367](#) AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS.

For over 25 years, BIAC has received an **operating grant (currently under the budget line “Services for Persons with Disabilities”)** from the Department of Social Services to provide resources and supports which the State is unable to provide. Each year since 2009, this grant has been threatened. In response, the Governor and legislature have received hundreds of calls, emails and testimonies protesting any cut. The Appropriations Committee heard their concerns and reinstated BIAC’s funding each of the past three years.

This year, as part of the budget rescissions, BIAC’s small \$126,352 grant was cut by over 10%. In [H.B.No. 6367](#), the entire Services for Persons with Disabilities line has been removed as has a number of other line items. The budget indicates that some funding was moved, in part, to the Community Services line item. ***We do not know if there is any funding for BIAC in that line item. We are seeking your commitment to funding \$150,000 for the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut within the Community Services line (with specific language referencing the grant in back of budget).***

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 Alliance 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 which has been contracted by this state for over 29 years to provide services which the state does not have the capacity to provide. 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 responding to more than 4000 contacts during the last year alone.

But that is not all we do. We also sponsor 30 support groups statewide, including three just for combat veterans.

BIAC provides critical training and consultation to most of the State key agencies- including DSS, VA, DCF, DPH, DOE, DOC, DMHAS, DDS, and BRS 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 the DSS public awareness campaign on brain injury, which they use each year, does not list any DSS phone number on their billboards and signs. ***It lists the BIAC Helpline number.***

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 Alliance of Connecticut a genuinely critical lifeline on what is always a very long and difficult journey back.

Despite an increase of over 600% in calls to BIAC’s helpline, BIAC has not received an increase in this grant in over 10 years, and, in fact, has only seen cuts. The bottom line is this: With BIAC the State’s *de facto* resource for brain injury services, eliminating or reducing BIAC’s operating grant will devastate the delivery of services and supports to thousands of Connecticut residents and the ever-increasing number of returning veterans 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 commit to funding the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut within the Department of Social Services and protect both the grant and those we serve - in the months and years to come. I thank you.