



CONNECTICUT
ASSOCIATION
of NONPROFITS

*...to serve, strengthen
and support Connecticut's
nonprofit community.*

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

2.14.14

Regarding

**HB 5030, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR
ENDING JUNE 30, 2015**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits) is the largest membership organization in Connecticut dedicated exclusively to working with nonprofits. We represent over 500 nonprofits, approximately 100 of which hold contracts with the Department of Children and Families. The Governor's budget proposes to close 3 Therapeutic Group Homes (TGH), 2 Safe Homes and 12 Short Term Assessment and Respite (STAR) beds within the DCF budget. We respectfully request that you reject the elimination of further congregate care.

Over the last three years DCF has eliminated a significant portion of the congregate care beds in Connecticut. The Department's goal is for all children to live in safe, healthy and stable family settings. Nonprofit providers agree that every child should grow up in a family; however it is important to recognize that sometimes placement in a family setting is not possible. In those cases, a safe, transitional environment is necessary so that children can be assessed, stabilized and begin treatment so they are ready for a more permanent placement.

Safe Homes, Group Homes and STAR Homes all play an important role in the continuum of care for children and youth. During calendar year 2013, STAR homes operated at an 88% utilization rate. Many of the referrals to STAR Homes are from failed foster placements where the child does not return to the foster family. In some cases, children have bounced in and out of a dozen foster homes before they are referred to a STAR program. STAR Homes also receive referrals directly from hospitals. These programs were designed as a short term treatment and respite option not as a step down from the hospital.

Safe Homes play an important role in supporting and guiding families, kin and foster families once the child has been placed in the family setting. The family, kin or foster parent can reach out to the Safe Home 24/7 for support and guidance from someone who knows the child and who has worked with the family during the transition. Safe Homes also have the ability to keep

siblings together until arrangements can be made to return home or be placed with a kin or foster family.

Therapeutic Group Homes are located in communities where children can attend the school in their district and can engage in activities within their local community. Children with significant behavioral health or developmental issues can receive treatment as well maintain connections with their family or a foster family. Although DCF does not currently consider TGH's as community based, these 4-6 bed programs were seen as smaller-scale community services when they were developed only five years ago. CT Nonprofits and our members are very concerned about what will happen to the children when these services are no longer available? Where will the children go?

To further eliminate treatment options available to children in Connecticut will only create more gaps in the system. For example, once these homes are closed they will never be re-opened. Most nonprofit Group/STAR/Safe Homes have long-established protocols for working with their community. They maintain relationships with the local police and fire departments and strive to ensure their presence in the community is as seamless as possible. Nonetheless it will be nearly impossible for the state to re-open these homes once they are closed.

The reduction in funding to the DCF budget, between \$50-75 million over the last 3-4 years, has primarily come from the closing of congregate care beds. Nearly all of the money has been absorbed into the general fund and has not been reinvested in the community services needed to serve the children no longer in congregate care. We do not want to see the same pattern as when Connecticut closed state hospital beds over 20 years ago. The provider community is extremely concerned with any further reductions to congregate care and we urge you to reject the proposal in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

For questions, please contact Colleen Kearney, Public Policy Specialist at ckearney@ctnonprofits.org or 860-525-5080.