

February 14, 2014

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony_H.B.5052

Debra J. Shulansky

My name is Deb Shulansky, Director of Community Outreach and Support at the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut, and I respectfully submit this testimony in regard to H.B. 5052, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS. I am asking for your commitment not only to re-instate the funding for the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut, but to increase our funding in light of the projected \$506 million state surplus.

As the Director of Community Outreach and Support, I oversee brain injury support groups throughout the State of Connecticut. In 2013, more than 2800 brain injury survivors and caregivers attended BIAC sponsored support groups. **The Medicaid ABI Waiver program mandates that the Department of Social Services (DSS) “[facilitate] monthly support groups throughout Connecticut to provide information and networking opportunities to clients and client families affected by brain injury” and DSS contracts with BIAC to fulfill this mandate because the State is unable to do so.** These support groups are open to traumatic brain injury survivors, their families and their caregivers. Several support groups specifically meet the needs of Combat Veterans returning from war. Each support group serves an important role in the re-integration of TBI survivors into the community. Without this funding, the existence and continuation of these support groups is at risk.

The only cure for a brain injury is prevention and BIAC's presence at Conferences and health fairs, to disseminate information on brain injury prevention, is critical in helping to prevent brain injuries from occurring. This information saves the state of Connecticut from the enormous costs of medical care and lost productivity which a brain injury can cause. BIAC's presence at these venues also connects individuals to available resources in our State. **The Medicaid ABI Waiver program mandates that DSS “[disseminate] information to the community related to brain injury” and DSS contracts with BIAC to fulfill this mandate because the State is unable to do so.**

BIAC is the only non-profit organization in the State to offer a diverse series of educational and training presentations devoted solely to brain injury prevention and awareness, at no charge.

The Medicaid ABI Waiver program mandates that DSS provide “[training] and community education programs” and DSS contracts with BIAC to fulfill this mandate because the State is unable to do so. In 2013, over 6100 children, educators and other professionals were reached through BIAC’s unique programs, which include BIAC’s critical training and consultation to many of the key State agencies- such as DSS, DCF, VA, DPH, DOE, DOC, DMHAS, DDS, and BRS - to assure that all those who work with an individual with a brain injury understand the challenges they face. In the process, we have helped to foster greater collaboration between these agencies, so that individuals are better identified and served. There is no other organization in the State of CT that offers the trainings BIAC offers, without charge, and we have been contracted by the State of Connecticut to do so for almost 30 years.

In summary, BIAC seeks your commitment to **re-instate, at a higher funding level**, the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut’s operating grant, which we receive through DSS, because **BIAC’s programs are necessary to ensure that the State of Connecticut is in compliance with the mandate of the Medicaid ABI Waiver program.** BIAC’s continued subsistence and vitality is necessary to ensure that brain injury survivors, their families and their caregivers receive support, and that brain injury prevention education programs which are not available elsewhere in the State remain in place. The cost to the State for just *one individual* who must remain in a costly acute care hospital setting would more than exceed the amount of funding which you propose to cut to our agency. We must ensure that these services are not reduced or eliminated altogether, in order to reduce the number of survivors turning to the State of Connecticut for help in the future, and to remain in compliance with the Medicaid ABI Waiver requirements.

Thank you.

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