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Oak Hill Professional
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Oak Hill Residential
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HB-5534: An Act Concerning the Provision of Services to Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (In Support)

HB-5558: An Act Concerning Services for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders (In Support)

Good afternoon Senator Gerratano, Representative Johnson, Representative Srinivasan and members of the committee. My name is Barry Simon and I am the President of Oak Hill. Oak Hill has been providing services for 120 years, and is a leader in providing the highest quality community-based programs; through education, assistive technology, programs and advocacy, we support people at every stage of life. Oak Hill, has 11 distinct programs; 113 program sites, classrooms, and homes located in 55 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,400 professionals to successfully meet the changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year. What is obvious to me as I visit the various programs and meeting participants and staff, is that Oak Hill does set the standard in providing education and lifelong learning opportunities to enhance independence and quality of life for people with disabilities. Yet, as Connecticut's largest POS provider of services for the disabled, it is very difficult to do business and pay a living wage.

I am here today on behalf of those we serve, my incredible staff (part of which are 1199 union staff) and hundreds of thousands of individuals served by the community provider system to ask that you look to strengthening the community provider system as a way of addressing aspects of the growing service crisis. We are a viable alternative to More Costly and Restrictive Levels of Care and are fully prepared to provide high quality services for all of CT's individuals with disabilities. The question is whether the state is willing to purchase those services. I am not here to pit one part of the system against another, as you are aware there is need for all parts to perform certain components, I am here to tell you that we provide innovative excellent care that saves the State money.

The true fix is with a long term solution for funding any services state or private; the last time we received an increase gas was \$1.67/gal. Programs have closed in the last few years and will continue to do so – this is not a false alarm. As an agency we have closed programs, made reductions in others, reduced staff, and reduced benefits due to the short sighted approach to state budgeting. As we work on plans for the future of the agency and providing services that meet the needs of those we serve, developing business strategies to succeed in this environment is next to impossible and, this will ultimately lead to dire consequences for the total community service system; this is the antithesis to what these bills are trying to accomplish.

HB 5534 and HB 5558 are important steps toward ensuring that all of CT's citizens with disabilities receive the services that they deserve. The creation

of a service plan for all of CT's individuals with disabilities is crucial, and must include provisions for comprehensive services for each of these individuals, according to each of their specific needs. We recognize and appreciate that the Legislature wants to invest the limited dollars wisely. In order to get the best return on your investment, funds need to be appropriated to address the comprehensive needs of the system and consumers. Given adequate resources that truly fund our costs of services, we have the capacity and willingness to expand services in the private sector; which saves the State money and brings in federal matching funds.

Specifically, cuts to DD Providers of both Residential and Day Services, must be restored:

- The Department of Developmental Services, more than any other agency, was subjected to forced lapses in FYs 2012 and 2013, totaling nearly \$30 million for those years alone, which lapses were passed on to providers.
- Forced closures of smaller group home settings are not in keeping with fiscal responsibility, quality of life, or the accurate definition of community living as defined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).
- There is no plan for day services for individuals with disabilities who do not have the capability to succeed on a time-limited "pre-vocational" track.
- Families, as evidenced by the Family Day Hearing, are incensed and alarmed at what they see as being "completely on their own" in caring for their loved ones. DDS no longer keeps a waiting list, spaces are reserved for emergencies only, such as when a parent dies. However, FOIA requests show there are more than 3,000 Connecticut citizens with disabilities waiting or need a plan for services.

Now, is a critical moment in time, higher costs and the lack of state support will mean program and service reductions and layoffs at the very moment we should be looking for less costly and more productive alternatives. Non-profit community providers are part of the solution for the future of the service delivery system and preserving the investment made in quality, cost effective, community care is imperative. We are innovative providers that improve independence and quality of life while also being a part of the solution to attack the unfunded liability issue for the State.

The 500,000 Connecticut residents that use community services and their families need you to help fix this systemic problem. There is history and models of system change that have worked, saved the State money, preserved jobs, and produced better outcomes. **The Network of Community Providers across Connecticut has the capacity to meet the needs of All Individuals and Families, if the State is willing to Purchase the Services.** The Administration and General Assembly say they care for our most vulnerable citizens. But what message do you really send? Please find the courage to find a way to make it right. Changes must be made now and they must continue consistently until all people with disabilities have a menu of services that meets their needs.

I thank you for your time and would be happy to answer any questions.