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*Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:*

Against H.B. No. 6846 an Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services Programs  
DDS and DMHAS Budgets

Submitted By: Barry M. Simon, President & CEO Oak Hill

Public Hearing Date: March 6 , 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Genga and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Barry Simon and I am the President Oak Hill. I have been in the field for over 25 years. 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 60 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,400 professionals to successfully meet the varied and changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year. As you might imagine, we have done quite a bit of changing over the 120 years with a commitment to the people we serve and our mission to 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 even more difficult to pay a living wage with 10 years of no net increases and decreases in our rates.

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. We need you to do the right thing at the right time; the people we serve matter, and the people we employ matter!

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 and policy. 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.

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***Our Mission: Oak Hill sets the standard, partnering with people with disabilities, to provide services and solutions promoting independence, education, health and dignity.***



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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 must be restored:**

- The DDS budget has seen devastating reductions in the past few years, more than any other agency; subjected to forced lapses in FYs 12 and 13, totaling nearly \$30 MM for those years alone, then in FYs 14 & 15 we received \$20 MM more totaling \$50 MM passed on to providers; the current proposed budget further slashes critical services and supports.
- Closures of community programs and services is not in keeping with fiscal responsibility, quality of life, or the definition of community living as defined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). It is only contributing to the Wait list issue and we strongly oppose the proposed cuts to Voluntary Services, and the underfunding of Community Residential Services and Employment/Day Services.
- Families are incensed and alarmed at what they see as being “completely on their own” in caring for their loved ones until the die.

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 the people we serve and our staff; 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.

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