

**Testimony of Kyle St. Jean, Staff Service Coordinator, Horizons,
Incorporated, South Windham, Connecticut to the
Appropriations Committee
An Act Concerning the Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017
Biennial Budget
March 6, 2015**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kyle St. Jean, and I am the Staff Service Coordinator at Horizons -- a private nonprofit agency located in South Windham. Our agency has been in operation for 36 years and provides individualized supports and services for people with special needs where they live, learn, work, and play. Horizons is a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

I speak before you in opposition to H.B. No. 6824 “**AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE,**” specific to the DDS budget.

I recently read newspaper articles regarding the governor’s budget. Over the next two years the governor proposes cuts to the Employment and Day Services budget by \$30 million, Residential Services by \$23 million, and new high school graduates programs by \$36 million; also, previous recessions are annualized – costing private providers \$21 million over those same two years.

These proposed budget cuts will have a shattering effect on my life and the lives of the people I support. These cuts reflect a sentiment in the government that the work I do is menial labor; however, I am here to tell this committee that the governor’s office grossly underestimates the value of my work. I am a skilled professional in my occupation of choice.

As a professional, I am required to have the following trainings: CPR, first aid, basic health, dysphasia, sign language, water/fire/safety skills, human rights, positive practices, hazardous materials, communicable disease control, defensive driving, abuse and neglect, THERAP documentation, agency policies and procedures, and physical and psychological management training.

Working for a nonprofit in human services essentially makes me a contracted employee of the State of Connecticut. Despite this relationship between the State and private providers, Horizons’ personnel reap far less benefits from the State than public employees. For instance, the final FY 2014 State budget included a 3 percent COLA for State employees in human services while private providers’ personnel only saw a 1