



THE
KENNEDY CENTER, Inc.
Celebrating the Potential of All People

Hearing Date: March 6, 2015

To: The Appropriations Committee

Submitted by: Martin D. Schwartz, President & CEO, The Kennedy Center, Inc.

Ref: 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.

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Martin D. Schwartz, President and CEO of The Kennedy Center, Inc. Like many of the organization providing testimony today, The Kennedy Center is a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits and the Connecticut Providers Association. My organization provides essential rehabilitative, vocational, recreational and residential services to over 2,000 individuals with disabilities and special needs, from birth through senior years. We are one of the most comprehensive rehabilitation facilities in Connecticut, serving individuals from 91 townships throughout the state. The Kennedy Center provides a variety of crucial support services that ensure people with disabilities have the opportunity to live and work as productive members of their community. We support people with disabilities so they can achieve independence with the respect and dignity that every citizen deserves.

Unfortunately, like so many nonprofit service providers, I have extreme concerns with H.B 6824 that further reduces funding to our most vulnerable citizens who cannot advocate for themselves. Simply stated, enough is enough! State rescissions to the Department of Developmental Services budget of \$30 million in 2012, in addition to \$5.5 million in November 2014 and \$8.4 in January, equates to more than 43 million in cuts, for a system that is already teetering on the verge of collapse.

If the budget is a direct reflection of our state's priorities, then we are in a sad state of affairs when the supports required for our most vulnerable citizens are in perpetual peril. Time and again, year after year, we have beseeched state leadership to increase funding for services that support people with disabilities. Costs for services are escalating, the number of people seeking programs steadily

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by



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increase, and the state funding continues to diminish. Failure to provide services for our most vulnerable populations should be unconscionable in one of the wealthiest states in our country. Instead, long-term inadequate funding jeopardizes the health and welfare of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and further intensifies the probability of more nonprofits closing their doors. Additional cuts means the state will incur even larger gaps in service for our most vulnerable citizens.

Upon examination, you can also see how failure to support people with disabilities also has other systemic implications for our state. Already, nonprofit service providers have been forced to close their doors, thereby eliminating services and forcing layoffs of quality employees that only add to our state's unemployment rates, and further contribute to the loss of state revenues. Furthermore, appallingly low wages for nonprofit staff remain incomparable to state employees that perform the identical jobs. According to a DDS Cost Computation Report in 2013, the annual cost for DDS residential care is \$338,730 per year versus the private provider whose cost of care for the same person is only \$129,114? It is tantamount to a slap in the face when our collective pleas for general support of people with developmental disabilities, their families and the businesses of nonprofit service providers are continually dismissed and ignored.

The newly proposed cuts, coupled with rescissions/budget modification dating back to late 2012, have put enormous pressure on an already severely depleted system. The reality is that nonprofit providers are pushed to the breaking point, due to the states' lack of investment that actually extends as far back as two decades. The entire systems of care for people with disabilities in the state of Connecticut, along with sustainability of the nonprofit service provider are an entirely integrated problem. It would be a gross mistake to separate or compartmentalize these matters that equally threatened services for people with disabilities. We sincerely hope that the Appropriations Committee and the entire Legislative I/DD Caucus take these pertinent issues into consideration, as you work on reconciling the next two year budget. A vital need for increased funding already exists; therefore additional cuts can only exacerbate the genuine threats to the quality of life of people with disabilities and every citizen whose quality of life and livelihood depends on the private provider system.

Please acknowledge the urgency of restoring previous budget recessions, in addition to the proposed FY16 cuts of: 11 million for Employment and Day services; and 4 million for Residential Services. We ask you to find a way to invest state funds in the nonprofit sector, because it is our moral obligation to provide for others who cannot

help themselves. Invest in the nonprofit sector because it will improve our state's service delivery, increase economic activity and save taxpayer money. Together we must seek ways to further strengthen our economy, without placing undue duress on our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

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