

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING

March 6, 2015

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Family Member and
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H.B. No. 6846: An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations For Human Services Programs

Both my mother and brother live with Spectrum Disorders and have never received funding for their needs. I have lived in despair with no where to turn at times, having to figure out how to support them or rescue them at times. It has cost a great deal of my life and my finances to support them by myself. It is too late for me, but not for others. There are thousands of families and individuals in my situation right now. And then, the Governor announces more funding cuts.

Frankly, DDS needs to equitably allocate its resources to private providers and not the state-funded programs, institutions, and pensions. Those excessive funds could go a long way to close the gap and help the providers pay decent wages to their employees, offer more innovative programs such as pilots with assistive technology and remote monitoring instead of expensive face-to-face staff support all the time.

The DDS budget has seen devastating reductions in the past few years; the current proposed budget further slashes critical services and supports. We strongly oppose the proposed cuts to Voluntary Services, and the underfunding of Community Residential Services and Employment/Day Services.

Voluntary Services are crucial for families of children with intellectual disabilities, giving them access to supports for behavioral challenges, activities of daily living, and many other needs. The proposed reduction of \$20.9M in FY 16 and \$14.9 in FY 17 will undoubtedly eliminate these supports for many families.

Employment and Day Services have already received cuts in past years, with an additional \$5M rescission this year. The proposed budget falls \$11M below projected costs for FY 16 and \$19M below projected costs for FY 17.

Community Residential Services have also received massive cuts in past years, most recently a \$10M annualized rescission last year, resulting in a reduction in reimbursement rates to providers, despite rising costs. The proposed budget falls \$4M below projected costs for FY 16 and \$12M below projected costs for FY 17.

Without funding the projected costs of service, providers will likely experience further reductions in reimbursements, pushing them to cut services. This is in the face of the state's waiting list for residential services, and ever-growing needs for day/employment supports.

Not only are community based services effective, but they are exceptionally economical. However, without rates of reimbursement based on the actual cost of services delivered, community providers cannot maintain viable business models.

Our state has a wide network of highly skilled and experienced professionals working in community based settings, providing services in accordance with best practices and evidence-based programs designed to meet the multiple and diverse needs of adults, children, and families. These services are effective, but chronically underfunded.

Reimbursement rates already do not cover the cost of care, leaving providers to operate at a loss for nearly every service delivered. This is illustrated in a report released by the Connecticut Community Providers Association, of which we are a member, which studies the real cost of care versus revenues of private providers. Among DD providers, for example, nine providers of 24-hour residential supports lose a total of \$8 thousand per day. We have already reduced our staffing schedules to bare minimum for health and safety in order to prevent our agency from having to reduce services or close. Read the full report at www.ccpa-inc.org.

At a time when all providers are facing rising costs and struggling to make ends meet, DDS has implemented a system designed to create uniformity of reimbursement rate that increases rates for some providers by reducing the rates of others. Ongoing budget cuts only exacerbate these issues by driving the “goal” rate down, despite ever-increasing costs.

As they continue to experience budget cuts, providers can no longer afford increasing costs and demand for services, which will soon lead to a reduction in services.

If this budget is adopted as is, we will destabilize the community based service system that so many of Connecticut’s citizens rely on.

Families use services across multiple agencies, relying on them as a safety net of supports. This budget puts services in many areas at risk, and will destabilize family units and ultimately the system as a whole.

We have experienced many difficult budgets in the past, but there has also always been an attempt to protect the lifesaving services that community based providers deliver to our citizens.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee spare providers of services to individuals with disabilities any further cuts, so that they may continue to serve the needs of Connecticut’s residents.