

Testimony Regarding S.B. 1135: An Act Establishing a Sustainable Path for Maintaining the Budget Reserve Fund and Reducing the Effect of Revenue Volatility on the State Budget

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Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee

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Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

S.B. 1135 seeks to reduce the effect of revenue volatility on our state's budget. I testify in favor of this effort, as well as in favor of higher revenue in the upcoming fiscal year to avoid harmful cuts to crucial public services.

The Governor's budget cuts nearly \$600 million from programs critical to families across the state, including deep cuts to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Since 2012, more than \$50 million has been cut from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). As a result, the DDS waiting list has grown to more than 2,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who need residential services. The state's current policy is to offer residential services to individuals with I/DD only after their caregiver becomes incapacitated or dies. This policy is inhumane and unacceptable, and is the result of years of DDS underfunding and budget cuts. In addition, many caregivers at nonprofit agencies have gone without raises for 8 years. Programs to support people with I/DD are closing at an alarming rate.

The Governor's proposed budget would make a bad situation worse for people with I/DD and their families. Day programs and employment supports will be delayed for an indefinite period following high school graduation. A cut of more than 60% of the budget for the Voluntary Services Program will leave families whose children have behavioral health issues and I/DD with nowhere to turn.

My 19 year old son has multiple disabilities, some diagnosed as recently as 5 years ago. Just before he was born, or perhaps during labor, he had a stroke to the left hemisphere of his brain. This resulted in Cerebral Palsy causing right side hemiparesis and seizures. He received services from the Birth to Three program and has had an IEP since entering preschool in our town. Additional affects of the stroke include visual problems due to strabismus and latent nystagmus, impulse control, ADHD, learning disabilities and social and emotional immaturity. When he was in 9th grade we had confirmed what we had suspected. He also has Asperger's Syndrome, now known simply as Autism Spectrum Disorder. We were very excited when we learned that an ASD program was going to be instituted by DDS as there are very few suitable programs in Connecticut that would meet my son's needs upon completion of 12th grade. He will also need

assistance after 21 when he will no longer qualify for services through our town's school system. Many good programs that do exist are very expensive or far away in other states. I knew that there was a waiting list for the DDS ASD program but was not aware, until recently, that it had stretched to 5 years for 2,000+ applicants. In spite of everything I know that my son is capable of being independent but his education and support will take longer for him to reach that goal. On another note, I am also responsible for a parent with Alzheimer's who receives the services from a caregiver through Title XIX, another program than is overburdened and underfunded. Why is it that the weakest of our population are subjected to increased costs, diminished services, or long waiting lists making them feel like second class citizens? There has to be a better way.

In order to avoid the harmful effect of these cuts, I ask the committee to raise revenue. I support the revenue ideas of groups like Connecticut Voices for Children, including a more progressive income tax, the elimination of certain tax breaks, and closing corporate tax loopholes, among others.

For example:

- If we choose to make our personal income tax more progressive (\$300 million), we can restore DDS cuts, provide residential services to people on the waiting list, and increase funding for nonprofit agencies so that they can provide wage increases to caregivers. This choice would leverage close to 50% in additional Medicaid funds;
- If we choose to enact combined reporting, a fix of an existing tax loophole that allows corporations that conduct business in multiple states to use accounting gimmicks to avoid paying state taxes (\$129.8 to \$149.5 million), we can restore funding and expand access to a whole range of other human services.
- Perhaps the estate taxes for the wealthy should not be eliminated in order that the already burdened programs for those least able to pay may be maintained.

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

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