

Testimony of Shelagh McClure and Tom Fiorentino
of West Hartford
submitted to the Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding
April 23, 2015

Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of Bill 1135, An Act Establishing A Sustainable Path For Maintaining The Budget Reserve Fund And Reducing The Effect Of Revenue Volatility On The State Budget

We are the parents of an adult son with an intellectual disability. We have been working with The Arc Families for Families group to support families, change the service delivery system so that more people with I/DD get services and restore funding for services that have been the subject of past budget cuts and rescissions.

Our son is on the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Waiting List for residential services. As of today, that Waiting List has over 2,000 people on it, and it will grow, as there is no money in the Governor's proposed budget to reduce it by funding any new placements.

The Governor's proposed budget, if adopted, will create a new waiting list for Day and Employment Services, as it suspends for the next two years, all funding for Day and Employment Service for high school graduates.

That means over the next two years, 600 high school graduates with intellectual disabilities will be left unserved by the State, a devastating change of policy due to this Governor's budget choice. Will the program be resumed thereafter? Will the providers retain capacity in the system to serve these young people after a two year hiatus, even if funding is reinstated? That is unknown at this time.

The Governor also proposes a 60% cut to the Voluntary Services Program (VSP), which serves adolescents with intellectual disabilities and severe behavioral diagnoses. This program, which provides in home services to families, prevents hospitalizations and keeps families together, and provides exactly the types of services recommended by the Governor's Sandy Hook Advisory Commission. The VSP would be decimated by the proposed cut.

Respite programs and family support grants also are drastically reduced. These programs also provide lifelines to families providing care to their loved ones with intellectual disabilities in their homes, often providing their only break, or their only caretaking assistance.

The State Independent Living Centers would be defunded under the Governor's budget. These centers, with a State budget of approximately \$500,000, save the State over \$5 million, and provide vital services to individuals leaving nursing homes and transitioning to community living.

All of these cuts we have outlined are proposed by the Governor in addition to the \$43 million in rescissions that the DDS budget has suffered in the past two years. There could be no better example of the negative effects that budget instability has on citizens of this State—particularly citizens with I/DD who rely on the State for vital support.

We need to introduce sanity and stability to our State budget process—that is why we urge you to support all options, including Bill 1135, that put State budgets on a path that reduces volatility and uncertainty, and that allow the State to fund necessary programs for our citizens with I/DD who rely upon these programs to live a good life.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today.