



Testimony Submitted to the Human Services Committee:

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In Support of H.B. No. 6947: An Act Concerning State Contracts for Human Services

Submitted By: Helen Bosch, Chief Executive Officer, Vista Vocational & Life Skills Center

Public Hearing Date: March 12, 2015

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Helen Bosch, Chief Executive Officer of Vista Vocational & Life Skills Center, a fully accredited, nationally recognized educational and training program offering an array of services to assist individuals with disabilities achieve personal success. We are among the 500+ member agencies of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

I would like to share my support for H.B. 6947, An Act Concerning State Contracts for Human Services. This bill asks the Governor and legislators to appropriately fund nonprofit providers by reviewing reimbursement rates and cost standards every two years to adjust rates for inflation or Consumer Price Index (CPI) growth. This change to the contracting process is necessary because the state has failed to adequately fund nonprofit providers for the last two decades and most recently, issued four rounds of rescissions since November 2012. This chronic underfunding threatens the sustainability of the state's nonprofit sector.

Here at Vista, in 2014, we served approximately 300 individuals and are continually growing. Naturally, our cost of doing business increases each year. Those increased costs, however, have not been reflected in rate adjustments for Medicaid fee-for-service programs or Purchase of Service-contracted programs. As highlighted in the CT Nonprofit Alliance report, the CPI has risen over 8% over the past 5 years, while POS contracts have only increased 1%. This puts tremendous pressure on nonprofits and ultimately hurts the populations we serve.

Additionally, we struggle to provide any wage parity with state and local public institutions such as school systems and state agencies. We also have found that, due to the rise in the state's minimum wage, it's become difficult for private nonprofits to keep pace and offer entry-level wages above that level, despite the professional skills needed. We are asking individuals who are caring for the most vulnerable of our state's population to work at less than a living wage. Their ability to stay within a nonprofit due to the wage discrepancy is difficult at best. Often, excellent employees leave for other careers or areas of service where they may be better paid.

Vista Vocational & Life Skills Center, Inc.

www.vistavocational.org

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This bill aims at reversing a troubling and unacceptable trend and will go a long way toward strengthening a severely weakened system. Without this funding increase, many nonprofit providers may have to reduce services which would likely result in your constituents travelling farther, paying more, waiting longer for programs, if not losing services altogether; and for nonprofits in your communities to close their doors. The reality is that the health and human service nonprofit providers have been continuously underfunded over the past two decades, pushing many to their breaking point.

It's time to stop putting so much pressure on the agencies that help so many of the state's most vulnerable residents. We respectfully urge you vote in favor of H.B. 6947. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Helen K. Bosch
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