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Testimony Submitted to the Public Health Committee:

In Support of SB No: 918: AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY.

Submitted By: Barry M. Simon, President & CEO Oak Hill

Public Hearing Date: March 4, 2015

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Crisco, Representative Riley and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Barry Simon and I am the President Oak Hill. I have been in the field for over 25 years. Oak Hill has been providing services for 120 years, and is a leader in providing the highest quality community-based programs; through education, assistive technology, programs and advocacy, we support people at every stage of life. Oak Hill, has 11 distinct programs; 113 program sites, classrooms, and homes located in 60 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,400 professionals to successfully meet the varied and changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year. As you might imagine, we have done quite a bit of changing over the 120 years but, what is obvious to me as I visit the various programs and meet with participants and staff, is that Oak Hill, like so many other community providers, is committed to the people we serve and our mission to set the standard in providing education and lifelong learning opportunities to enhance independence and quality of life for people with disabilities. Yet, as Connecticut's largest POS provider of services for the disabled, it is very difficult to do business and even more difficult to pay a living wage with the proposed budget of 10 years of no net increases and significant decreases to the DDS budget.

I would like to share my support for SB 918, An Act Concerning the Provision of services to individuals with intellectual disability. This bill requires the Department of Developmental Services to provide certain services to individuals with intellectual disabilities which shall include, but need not be limited to, community-based residential services, respite care, emergency care, day program services, vocational services and in-home support services. Such plan shall include: A description of additional staffing and facilities that the department anticipates are likely to be required to provide the services described in this subsection; the amount of the appropriation required to provide such services; a description of any Medicaid waiver that is likely to be required to provide such services; and a description of additional resources that are likely to be required to provide such services.

This is necessary because the state has failed to adequately support and fund nonprofit providers for the last two decades forcing many nonprofits to close, lay-off employees, reduce benefit packages; altogether creating a win or lose system that weakens the entire nonprofit sector and threatens its sustainability. The true fix is with a long term solution and for funding any services. Programs have closed in the last few years and will continue to do so – this is not a false alarm. As an agency we have closed programs, made reductions in others, reduced staff, and reduced benefits

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Our Mission: Oak Hill sets the standard, partnering with people with disabilities, to provide services and solutions promoting independence, education, health and dignity.



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due to the short sighted approach to state budgeting. As we work on plans for the future of our agency and providing services that meet the needs of those we serve, developing business strategies to succeed in this environment is next to impossible and, this will ultimately lead to dire consequences for the total community service system.

Given a plan and adequate resources that truly fund our costs of services, we have the capacity and willingness to expand services in the private sector; which saves the State money and brings in federal matching funds. However, it is hard to provide care, take on more individuals, and innovate while the system is being cut.

Our employees are some of the hardest working professionals across the state and have had to bear the burden of underfunding, going years without salary increases while simultaneously watching benefit packages deteriorate. Consequentially, many of us struggle to keep a quality workforce, as we experience high turnover with employees considering state employment or similar jobs providing higher wages and better benefits. In turn, high turnover adversely affects the clients we serve who have grown comfortable with their nurse, social worker, roommate or mentor. The reality is that the health and human service nonprofit providers have been continuously underfunded over the past two decades, pushing many of us to our breaking point.

This bill represents an opportunity to improve the quality of life for the people we serve and the economic activity in our communities for your constituents. Investing in nonprofit providers will improve service delivery, increase economic activity, and save taxpayer money. This bill is a “win-win” for policymakers working to strengthen the service system and the economy, the nonprofit workforce trying to make ends meet, and the clients (and their families) who receive cost-effective, high-quality and efficient services from nonprofit providers.

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

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