



CONNECTICUT  
ASSOCIATION  
of NONPROFITS

*...to serve, strengthen  
and support Connecticut's  
nonprofit community.*

## Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

Submitted by: Colleen Kearney, CT Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits)

### H.B. No. 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue.

February 27, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Colleen Kearney and I am a Public Policy Specialist with the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits). CT Nonprofits is the largest membership organization in Connecticut dedicated exclusively to working with nonprofits. I would like to share my concerns with H.B. 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue. In particular, I want to express my sincere concerns to the funding reductions in the DCF and DSS budgets.

We share the concerns of the DCF federal court monitor, that the reduction of congregate care without sufficient reinvestment in community based services is jeopardizing the well-being of our state's children. Therefore we oppose the elimination of two Therapeutic Group Homes and a Short Term Assessment and Respite (STAR) Home. Although DCF does not currently consider these homes as community based, they were at one time. Children residing in these programs attend local schools; participate in extra curricular activities, community activities and family work.

To further eliminate treatment options available to children in Connecticut will only create more gaps in the system. Therapeutic Foster Care providers receive an overwhelming number of emergency referrals from DCF. This means a child needs somewhere to go immediately due to a failed foster placement, release from detention, the Solnit Center, or when temporary custody to DCF has been ordered by a judge. The amount of requests is so great that the Court Monitor has decided to review a sample of cases to determine where efforts need to be better coordinated. STAR Homes, in particular, can serve as respite placements when a child needs somewhere to go immediately.

We also remain extremely concerned that internal DCF policies are discouraging staff from referring children to congregate settings even when they feel a placement is in the best interest of the child and have clinical recommendations to support them. Some children need short term stabilization and, at times, congregate care services are necessary and help to support permanency. Our members, who provide services across the full continuum of treatment options available to children and youth, feel these and other issues within DCF are cause for alarm.

We also do not agree with the movement of juvenile justice functions from the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch to the Department of Children and Families. DCF already has the tremendous task of serving children in the child welfare system and to add more to their plate would be unreasonable. We also oppose the proposed reductions for pre-adjudication services for youth by \$10 million dollars. These are the programs and services that meet youth's needs before they enter into the deepest end of the juvenile justice system. They include trauma services, services for status offenders, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment and family therapy. We have learned through the implementation of Raise the Age that investment in the pre-adjudication segment of the juvenile justice system reduces recidivism and saves money.

There are a number of programs eliminated in the DSS budget that we feel strongly should be added back. Teen Pregnancy Prevention has been completely eliminated. This evidenced based program serves 800 students in some of the neediest communities in our state and was endorsed by the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee in 2012. There are many other exceptional programs being eliminated including: The Fatherhood Initiative, Covenant to Care, Neighborhood Centers, Consultation to the Safe Harbors Task Force, Services for Pregnant Incarcerated Women, and Family Support Services. We also feel the closure of the Torrington DSS Office will be extremely difficult for residents of Northwest CT to manage. Transportation is already a concern for this rural area and to close this office will severely impact access.

The proposed cuts, coupled with four rounds of rescissions/budget modification dating back to late 2012, have put enormous pressure onto an already severely depleted system. The reality is that nonprofit providers have been pushed to our breaking point due to the lack of investment over the past two decades. Chronic underfunding has already forced many nonprofits to close, compete against one another for scarce resources, layoff employees, reduce benefit packages; altogether creating a win or lose system that weakens the entire nonprofit sector and threatens its sustainability.

As members of the Appropriations Committee work toward creating your 'Recommended Budget' for SFY16 and 17, I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure critical programs and services are available to the residents of Connecticut. I'd also like to respectfully remind you that investing in the nonprofit sector will improve service delivery, increase economic activity, and save taxpayer money; a "win-win" for policymakers working to strengthen the economy, the nonprofit workforce trying to make ends meet, and most importantly, the clients and their families who count-on efficient, cost-effective, and high-quality services in our communities.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues. Please feel free to reach out to me with questions.

*For questions, please contact Colleen Kearney, Public Policy Specialist at [ckearney@ctnonprofits.org](mailto:ckearney@ctnonprofits.org) or 860-525-5080.*