

**Testimony of Sharon Fors, Assistant Director of Supported
Employment and Options, Horizons Programs, Incorporated,
South Windham, Connecticut to the Appropriations Committee
An Act Concerning the Governor's Proposed FY 2016-2017
Biennial Budget
March 6, 2015**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sharon Fors, and I am an Assistant Director of Supported Employment and Options at Horizons -- a private nonprofit agency located in South Windham. Our agency has been in operation for 36 years and provides high quality individualized supports and services for people with special needs where they live, learn, work, and play. Horizons is a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

I speak before you in opposition to 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,”** specific to the DDS budget.

I recently read newspaper articles regarding the governor’s budget. Over the next two years the governor proposes cuts to the Employment and Day Services budget by \$30 million, Residential Services by \$23 million, and new high school graduates programs by \$36 million; also, previous recessions are annualized – costing private providers \$21 million over those same two years.

These proposed budget cuts will have a shattering effect on my life and the lives of the people my team and I support. Many individuals that we support will lose their jobs and their chance to take a rightful and meaningful place in their communities. These cuts reflect a sentiment in the government that the work we do is unimportant and that the people we support are unimportant. However, I am here to tell this committee that the governor’s office grossly underestimates the value of our work and the difference it makes in the lives of the individuals that we support. We are skilled professionals in our occupation of choice.

As professionals, all the members of my team are required to have the following trainings: CPR, first aid, basic health, dysphasia, sign language, water/fire/safety skills, human rights, positive practices, hazardous materials, communicable disease control, defensive driving, abuse and neglect, THERAP documentation, agency policies and procedures, and physical and psychological management training. I have 12 years of experience in this field. All of those years spent working for a private nonprofit agency

that provides high quality supports. I have seen the very positive difference our work has brought about in the lives of the people we support.

Working for a nonprofit in human services essentially makes me a contracted employee of the State of Connecticut. Despite this relationship between the State and private providers, Horizons' personnel reap far less benefits from the State than public employees. For instance, the final FY 2014 State budget included a 3 percent COLA for State employees in human services while private providers' personnel only saw a 1 percent increase in wages in the same budget. This 1 percent COLA was only given for half the year making it far less money for private providers' employees; in addition, after further rescissions in the State budget we actually received no COLA, so we took a net loss in wages over that time period.

In light of these facts, I ask this Committee, the Connecticut General Assembly, and Governor Malloy to discard the proposed cuts to DDS' budget. These proposed cuts threaten my economic security, the economic security of my team, would have a serious negative impact on the lives of the people we support and would diminish private providers' ability to retain well trained staff. I hope the Appropriations Committee considers my testimony when drafting their budget and when negotiating with OPM and the Governor about proposed budget cuts. Thank you.