

**Testimony of Megan Barbour, Job Support Coach at Horizons,
Incorporated, South Windham, Connecticut to the
Appropriations Committee**

**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**

March 6, 2015

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Megan Barbour, and I am a Job Support Coach in 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 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 I support. These cuts reflect a sentiment in the government that the work I do is menial labor; however, I am here to tell this committee that the governor’s office grossly underestimates the value of my work. I am a skilled professional in my occupation of choice.

As a professional, I am 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. In my position as Job Support Coach, I support individuals at community-based job sites, working alongside them, modeling work ethic, and assisting them to utilize their strengths and be as independent and successful at

their job as possible. I also provide In Home Supports for individuals during which they learn new skills and hobbies, such as cooking, shopping, and computer skills, planning and budgeting outings with peers, and experiencing all of the wonderful things life has to offer them.

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 I actually received no COLA, so I 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 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.