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Testimony: Appropriations Committee

March 6, 2015

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Harp and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Melissa Marshall. I live in West Hartford and I'm here today in my capacity as Coordinator of the Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance, a coalition representing people from all disability groups. I'm here today to urge you to restore funding to DMHAS and DDS in the biennium budget.

Occasionally, in a coalition such as the Alliance, there is disagreement about approaches to situations or priorities. The Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance is very clear and in complete agreement that the Governor's budget is injurious to people with disabilities across the board. Last week, many of us testified in opposition to the DORS budget which would eliminate Centers for Independent Living. Tonight, we're advocating for very basic needs of people with intellectual disabilities and people in the DMHAS system.

I will begin with the cuts to DMHAS. This is not in order of priority; each set of cuts will be devastating to their respective disability communities. The Governor's budget eliminates the funding that the Connecticut Legal Rights Project receives for housing advocacy. This will eliminate its housing advocacy program and will squelch its ability to represent clients with psychiatric disabilities on crucial issues. Once again, cuts are being proposed that will in the end cost the state money. Without CLRP's advocacy, people with psychiatric disabilities will be hospitalized or visit the emergency room more frequently. Without CLRP's services many people with psychiatric disabilities will end up homeless because of illegal evictions, substandard housing and discrimination which up until now CLRP has protected them from.

The DMHAS budget also eliminates the Regional Mental Health Boards. This will ultimately cost the state money. The five Regional Mental Health Boards with two staff each mobilize 500 volunteers annually. The boards' collaboration helps bring in \$23 million in federal funds to the state. Plus, they are a vital liaison between the state local communities and service providers. The Boards assess service needs and evaluate services to ensure that the state is spending its dollars efficiently. We urge you to restore funding for CLRP and the Regional Mental Health Boards.



The state also needs to continue to invest in supportive housing. The evidence clearly demonstrates that supportive housing ultimately saves money in Medicaid expenses.

Now I turn to the DDS budget. Those of you serve on the I/DD Caucus are all too familiar with the pain faced by people with intellectual disabilities and their families in the state. The proposed budget doesn't eliminate that pain, increases it. Among the most egregious cuts are cuts Voluntary Services Program (VSP) under the proposed budget will be no new VSP development, no new cases transferred from DCF and VSP recipients who do not receive Title 19 will be discharged.

The budget contains no new funds for families languishing on the waitlist. As it stands 2,000 people with I/DD are waiting list with no hope or no plan of receiving services unless there is a major emergency.

Ironically, despite these difficult fiscal times and calls from people disabilities, family members, advocates and national experts to close Southbury Training School and the five Regional Centers the state continues to fund them with precious state resources. Keeping them open is a wasteful use of state dollars. I refer you to the testimony of many family members and people disabilities on Family Day in January about this issue.

The State of Connecticut must break its pattern of making shortsighted budget cuts that will in the end cost the State a significant amount of money and not making cuts to institutions which are costly, ineffective and hurtful to people disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration today.