

**Testimony of Ruth A. Lussier, Program Administrative Assistant  
Horizons, 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 Ruth A. Lussier, and I am a Program Administrative Assistant 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 have been employed for Horizons for nearly 20 years.

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 THEREFORE AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE,"** specific to the DDS budget.

I have been reading newspaper and on-line 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 profound and negative effect on my life and the lives of the people I support. These cuts reflect a sentiment in the State 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: water/fire/safety skills, human rights, positive practices, hazardous materials, abuse and neglect, THERAP documentation, and agency policies and procedures.

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 and several times over these past 20 years.

I perceive the **continued reduction of funds for services for people with disabilities as a degradation of their human rights**. Because many people with disabilities are unable to voice their displeasure, **I believe the State of Connecticut lawmakers who represent them do not see them as their constituents**. I also believe that many individuals with disabilities are fully aware of the outcome of cuts to their services. I hear them ask for the kinds of services that were part of their

daily and weekly program in the past which, because of budgetary cuts, have been continually chipped away.

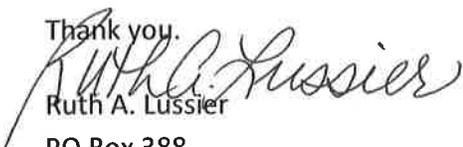
Having worked for Horizons for almost 20 years, I cannot state strongly enough that this agency has always worked diligently to continue to provide the same, or improved, excellent and person-centered services for people with disabilities that they have known in their programs, **despite budgetary cuts**. However, there comes a time when the funds cannot be stretched any further. That time is **NOW**.

I have written and e-mailed Governors, Representatives and Senators over these 20 years. I have encouraged, *especially the Governor*, to come to Horizons and view what we do. To meet the people we serve. To see them each as the unique people they are, having individual needs and preferences. To my knowledge, the Governor has never visited.

Considering the financial facts discussed above, and my personal belief that people with disabilities deserve adequate programs, 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, would diminish private providers' ability retain well-trained staff, and further cut the important programs we provide the individuals we support.

I remind you that I am your constituent. You were elected by the people to serve in your position to conduct State business. The Appropriations Committee is obligated to consider my testimony when drafting their budget and when negotiating with OPM and the governor about proposed budget cuts. I expect nothing less.

Thank you.

  
Ruth A. Lussier

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cc:

Susan M. Johnson, State Representative, District 49  
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U. S. Senator Richard Blumenthal  
U. S. Senator Christopher Murphy  
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