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To: Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

From: Barry Simon, President & CEO

Re: S.B. No. 1135: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SUSTAINABLE PATH FOR MAINTAINING THE BUDGET RESERVE FUND AND REDUCING THE EFFECT OF REVENUE VOLATILITY ON THE STATE BUDGET

Date: April 23, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Berger, Senator Frantz, Representative Davis, and distinguished members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Barry Simon and I am the President of Oak Hill. I am here today on behalf of those we serve and my incredible staff (part of which are 1199 union staff). Oak Hill has been providing services for 120 years, and is a leader in providing the highest quality community-based programs; through education, assistive technology, programs and advocacy, we support people at every stage of life. Oak Hill, has 13 distinct programs; 120 program sites, classrooms, and homes located in 59 towns. Oak Hill employs over 1,400 professionals to successfully meet the changing needs of close to 40,000 people with disabilities each year. What is obvious to me as I visit the various programs and meeting participants and staff, is that Oak Hill does set the standard in providing education and lifelong learning opportunities to enhance independence and quality of life for people with disabilities. Yet, as Connecticut's largest POS provider of services for the disabled, it is very difficult to do business in Connecticut and pay a living wage.

I am here today to testify in support of S.B. 1135, which seeks to reduce the effect of revenue volatility on our state's budget. We support this effort, as well as options that represent responsible revenue measures in the upcoming fiscal year that would also lead to responsible spending to avoid harmful cuts to essential health and human services. As it stands, the proposed budget would cut spending in every area of health and human services, including:

- \$107 million cut to Medicaid rates
- \$20 million cut from the Voluntary Services Program, which provides services to families needed to keep their children at home
- \$5 million cut in Employment and Day Services rolled into the FY16 budget recommendations
- \$25 million cut to outpatient mental health and addiction services
- \$3 million residential services for children
- \$10.5 million school based health programs

We understand that this is a lean budget, but in difficult and uncertain economic times, families and individuals need the services of community providers more than ever. The true fix is with a long term solution for funding any services state or private; the last time we received an increase gas was \$1.67/gal. and, with the proposed budget, our staff have not had raises in 10 years. Programs have closed in the last few years and will continue to do so – this is not a false alarm. As an agency we have closed programs, made reductions in others, reduced staff, and reduced benefits due to

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the short sighted approach to state budgeting and policy. As we work on plans for the future of the agency and providing services that meet the needs of those we serve, developing business strategies to succeed in this environment is next to impossible and, this will ultimately lead to dire consequences for the total community service system; this is the antithesis to what these bills are trying to accomplish.

Cuts to DDS Voluntary Services are also unacceptable. As the state struggles to adequately fund developmental disability services, waiting lists continue to grow, depriving families of essential services for their loved ones, and preventing them from living safe and independent lives. Connecticut has the third highest per capita income in the nation, yet we are not adequately funding needed services.

Implementing the proposed cuts in lieu of responsible budgeting shortsighted. Failing to invest now in health and human services means that we as a state will pay much more down the road. Individuals and families in need of critical preventative and early intervention services do not simply disappear if care is no longer available. Instead, they may seek exponentially more expensive care in emergency departments or worse, not at all. The human, community, and economic costs of cuts to services are difficult to measure, but they are real, and they dwarf the short-term impact of budget cuts. In order to avoid the harmful effect of the proposed cuts to health and human services, we ask the committee to raise revenue.

Connecticut needs to invest in its priorities. Community providers improve and save lives. They also strengthen the economy and the safety and security of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues. I am happy to answer your questions or provide additional information.

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