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Testimony of Deborah Chernoff

Public Policy Director, New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, SEIU

Before the Public Health Committee, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015

In re: DDS Senate Bill 918 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

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Good morning, Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Deborah Chernoff, Public Policy Director for District 1199, and I testify today on behalf of our union's members who work in both the public and the private sector delivering services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our state. Our members strongly support Senate Bill 918.

Connecticut does not have a comprehensive plan for meeting the urgent needs of the some 2,000 people currently on the DDS waiting and residential needs lists, much less all people not yet eligible but who will DDS services in the near future. Year after year, State funding decisions have created policies which limit choices and independence for people with disabilities and erode the wages and benefits of care givers. Bill 918 establishes a framework and a process for including all stakeholders in developing a plan that supports and advances the Department's mission.

Beyond creating and support a comprehensive plan, SB 918 would also ensure that the we move actually move forward to implement it and ensure that whatever the level of need or the type of service required, individuals with intellectual disabilities – and their families – get more than an empty promise for services someday. It would also assure that we set up a dynamic that cuts needed services in one area or for one population in order to provide services elsewhere.

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As a Union we support real systems change with wide array of alternatives; whether those supports are residential, in-home, day programming, vocational, or educational, our members are able and willing to provide these them. We want to be part of the solution.

This is SB 918. It calls for all stakeholders to forge a plan for a broad spectrum of services for all stages of life and all types of need. It calls for a time table for creating this plan and its implementation. It calls for implementing such a plan without undermining currently provided services and the wage and benefits of the care givers providing those services. 1199 members are ready to get to work building a system that lives up to the promise.

We strongly support SB 918, thank you for your attention to these urgent issues and will be happy to answer your questions.