

Deborah De Vivo
18 Johanna Circle
Southington, CT 06489

Appropriations Committee Hearing
February 18, 2016

Bill No. 5044 , An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before your Committee.

My name is Deborah De Vivo. I have been a Social Worker/Case Manager with the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) for the past 33 years. I am here to testify against Bill 5044.

The 31.8 Million dollars that is proposed to be cut from the DDS budget will have a devastating effect on Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. These extensive cuts also include a plan to privatize 30 additional state-operated Group Homes.

To the individuals who reside in these 30 residences, this is their HOME. They have been together with their housemates and the staff who provide their care for many, many years. They are a family.

Think of what it will feel like to these individuals to suddenly have all new caregivers. They will be losing all the people who are familiar to them and strangers who do not know them will be providing their care. Is this something that you would want to see happen to one of your family members?

The decision to privatize these homes does not take the needs of these individuals into consideration and does not respect their wishes. Our Department tells us that the individuals we serve are to always be put first, that services should be "person-centered", but that is not what is occurring here.

We've unfortunately been down this road before. In 2009, 17 state-operated homes were rapidly transitioned over to private agencies. Contrary to what our Department would have you believe, this did not go well! There were significant and very negative impacts to the individuals who lived in those homes.

As a Social Worker/Case Manager with DDS, one of the most important facets of my job is overseeing the services to the individuals on my caseload. I see first-hand the challenges that our private agencies deal with every day. They have been operating with flat funding for years while the cost of providing services has gone up. It's no different than your home or my home...costs have risen, but the funding to the private agencies has not. Staff turnover continues to be very high as a result. The continuity of care is so crucial to the individuals who we serve, but in the private agencies, the continuity is just not there.

With our Department's Waiting List of more than 2000 individuals who are in need of residential services, it is very hard to understand the proposed cuts to DDS that are of such magnitude! These cuts will result in the Waiting List individuals continuing to be left without services that they desperately need and will also continue to cause immense stress to the families who struggle to provide care to their family members with intellectual disability.

I think it is incumbent on DDS to make wiser decisions on how funding that is allocated to the Department is spent. Those of who are on the "ground level" each and every day, see crucial funding needs that should be a priority ignored while other areas become the priority.

The State's budget should not be balanced at the expense of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens. We look to your help and support to ensure that critically needed services and funding for the individuals who are served by DDS is restored.