

Testimony of Shelagh McClure, Chair
Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities
Before the Appropriations Committee
On House Bill 5044
February 18, 2016
Submitted to: apptestimony@cga.ct.gov

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to Bill 5044, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

I am Chair of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, a public agency whose mission is to promote independence and full inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities in their communities, and to foster capacity building and system change. I am also the parent of a 25-year old son with an intellectual disability who lives at home with my husband and me.

Since 2012, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) budget has been cut over \$60 million. Two thousand people are on the Waiting List for residential services, and, beginning in FY 2016, a new waiting list for Employment and Day Services was created due to funding cuts. Almost 800 people are on the Waiting List for Autism Services. The DDS system is in crisis.

If all of the Governor's proposed cuts for FY 2017 are adopted, people with I/DD face over \$60 million in additional cuts in FY 2017 alone, if you total the proposed cuts to DDS (which build in year-end lapses and deficit mitigation reductions from the current fiscal year), and add the proposed cuts to municipal aid for special education services, cuts to the Office of Early Childhood for early childhood birth to three services, and to DORS eliminating the independent living centers. We are told next biennium budget will be even worse.

The Council does not envy you in facing this task of developing a budget in bleak fiscal times. However, it has been bleak fiscal times for people with intellectual disabilities for years, with growing waiting lists and shrinking

hope that a solution will be found anytime soon. In the face of this reality, we are looking to the Appropriations Committee to reject the Governor's one size fits all approach to budgeting, imposing an across the board 5.75% cut.

Every budget cut is not created equal, and every individual affected by cuts to an agency budget cannot equally withstand their impact. I have heard Chairman Bye speak passionately about the need to protect the safety net for those in our society who would be most harmed by the loss of state funding. She is right. It is that simple. It is that clear. Those served by DDS are certainly among the people who would be harmed most by an unthinking, across the board cut. We call upon the Committee to preserve the DDS budget at its current level, or at a minimum, do not expose it to the same level of cut as all other agencies.

Hard decisions will need to be made about delaying projects, or not offering some services that in better times we all would like to have. But our family members with intellectual disabilities, who have already withstood the years of budget cuts, disproportionate and cruel, are not projects that can be delayed; services not provided have serious long-term impacts. Our Council urges this committee to reflect on the disproportionate impact of the proposed cuts, and stand up for our family members with I/DD by rejecting the Governor's proposed budget cuts to DDS.

The Council also does not support the Governor's proposal to move to a "block grant" approach to budgeting. The block grant approach was advanced by the Governor as a means to give his Commissioners greater flexibility in how they spend the dollars appropriated by the legislature. The Council's view is that this approach takes away too much authority from the Legislative Branch in setting spending priorities, and removes critical public input afforded by the public hearing process, since all spending decisions would be vested in the Executive Branch. Under the Governor's proposal, only after money has been expended by the bureaucrats in the Executive Branch would the public, including the legislature, learn how the dollars were spent. This proposal should receive a resounding rejection from the legislature.

Finally, the Governor has proposed to move the entire Community Residential Services line item from DDS to the Department of Social Services (DSS). This proposal was launched with no prior notice to families or advocates, so it is not clear what is intended by the Administration in making this proposal. Into this void, the Council offers the following comments and questions:

(1) If we were in the Committee's shoes, we would have the following question for the Administration:

- a. **how will this proposal improve the delivery of services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities**—which is a budget priority identified by the Governor. Because here is the fear of parents and family members of individuals currently unserved or underserved in the DDS system—that this will be just other way to cut the budget on the backs of people with I/DD, dressed up as system reform.
- b. **What is the role of DDS in residential services if this proposal is adopted**—who performs case management, quality assurance?
- c. **How does this proposal intersect with the proposed Intellectual Disabilities Partnership (SB 17)?**

(2) This proposal does not address the public residential facilities, where there are high costs, and where great savings (for expanded services) could be achieved by accelerated closure. While there may be savings to be achieved from private providers' services, multiple sources support the notion that the State must begin to look for savings from its publicly operated facilities. Conversion of public group homes to private providers is a start, but closure of the state operated institutions should also become a priority.

(3) DSS has a long and unhappy history of payment and communication problems. Moving over \$500 million additional dollars into DSS' budget with no explanation of how it will be absorbed, how staffing will be handled, how communication with the public/providers/individuals receiving services will be managed should be a huge red flag for the Committee, and should demand detailed information before any action is taken on this proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony