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Testimony Before the Human Services Committee Regarding Governor's Bill 17 AN ACT  
IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES.

February 18, 2016

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to Governor's Bill 17, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services.

I am Stan Soby, Vice President for Public Policy and External Affairs, at the Connecticut Institute for the Blind, known as Oak Hill, a recognized leader in providing community-based programs: housing, employment training, education, assistive technology, healthy relationships, early intervention, and recreation to children and adults with multiple disabilities (including visual impairments). Oak Hill employs over 1,300 professionals who work at our 115 program sites located in 55 towns throughout Connecticut.

The following is a list of our 16 distinct programs which continue to evolve to successfully meet the changing needs of thousands of people with disabilities each year: Art Therapy, Autism Services, New England Assistive Technology (NEAT), Birth to Three, Center for Relationships & Sexuality (CRSE), Chapter 126 Sports & Fitness, Community Companion Homes, Day Services/Supportive Employment, Equipment Restoration Center (ERC), The Hemlocks Center, In Home Supports, Oak Hill School, Oak Hill Camp, Professional Development, Residential Services and Services for the Blind.

Seventy-six (76) Program locations are licensed as Community Living Arrangements (CLAs), generally known as group homes.

I am here to speak to Sec 2 (e) and (f) of Governor's Bill 17. Oak Hill has developed CLAs over a nearly forty (40) year period, working with the Corporation for Independent Living utilizing a State Bond issuance, working with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 202 and 811 programs, utilizing funding through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and using commercial lenders.

Non-profit entities, like Oak Hill, should continue have the ability to divest of properties that no longer meet the needs of people served or that no longer work on a financial level as a way to help maintain fiscal viability in the pursuit of Mission and direct any gains realized from the sale of such properties towards the charitable purposes of the organization. During my tenure, the sale of property has only been used to redevelop new homes or new programs. We have also subsidized the cost of these homes with fundraising, some as much as \$100,000/yr. This change seems highly regressive and could impede continued partnering to do business.

While we appreciate that the current thinking at DDS is different, during the previous Commissioner's tenure, agencies were told they should address un-fillable vacancies by internal movement of people served and divestiture of houses.

With regard to the language of Section 2 (e), DDS currently has oversight on the location of CLAs through the development agreement and licensing processes. DSS has existing oversight through the development agreement, rate setting and cost reporting processes.

A question arises, given the wording in Section 2 (f), when the provider agency is leasing a property and the non-provider owner of the property looks to sell it. Does this language apply in that instance? If so, it seems one could raise eminent domain issues. Or does this logic extend to other businesses like paving companies; does the State then own the paving machines and trucks?

Depending on timeframes and changes in property values, the language in Section 2 (f) might cause a financial loss for a provider as readily as a gain could be realized.

If there has been a specific issue of concern with regard to such transactions not being re-invested in the charitable work of an organization, that might best be addressed more specifically than the proposed language in this bill.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.