

Sen. Gerratana, Sen. Somers, and Rep. Steinberg:

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony on SB 38, 39, 244, 245, 246, 836 and HB 5808.

My name is Tom Fiorentino and I am the president of the Arc of Connecticut board of directors, the state's oldest and largest advocacy group for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). I am also the parent of an adult child with an intellectual disability who, because of the State's inefficient and underfunded system of supports, will live with us until both his mother and I are either dead or permanently disabled. As much as it might pain you, this is the current policy of the State of Connecticut.

If you find your policy objectionable, then you cannot support SB 38. Despite your own studies (please see the report of the Program Review and Investigations Committee on the provision of services to people with I/DD) that conclude that it is absolutely impossible to sustain a system that includes services delivered by public employees, the State has refused to end those services, regardless of the cost, and regardless of the damage inflicted.

If this bill is passed, you will have locked into law the glaring inefficiencies inherent in the public system. If you choose to do that, please do not do it in the name of people with I/DD, as their interests have nothing to do with this bill, and will in fact be harmed by its passage. Quite frankly, it is bad enough that public policy in Connecticut has been so skewed by the influence of those outside of the I/DD community, but in some ways it is even worse when the victims of that skewed policy are used as the putative beneficiaries. I urge you to reject this bill and to recognize the harm it will do.

The Arc also urges the rejection of SB 39 because this partnership might include the antiquated, outmoded and extravagant institutions that are a black mark on Connecticut's progressive reputation. I am extremely concerned that SB 39 is an attempt to revitalize institutions in the guise of a creating a continuum of services (something that 15 other states have done without the need for institutions.) A continuum of services is a necessity; the continuation of institutions is a segregating, antiquated extravagance.

SB 244 and 246 should be rejected unless it is clear that absolutely no additional staffing or DDS funds will be expended in their implementation. These bills, while being well-intentioned, will do nothing to improve or expand services for people with I/DD. DDS is already charged with carrying out the functions set out in these bills. (E.g., DDS already maintains a waiting list, by region which is updated quarterly, not annually as is proposed, and DDS Case Managers are already charged with conducting needs assessments and developing an individual plans.)

People are not being denied services because, as some mistakenly believe, DDS is unaware of their needs. I am concerned that these bills feed and perpetuate that myth. Services are being denied due to a lack of funding not a lack of awareness at DDS. We do not want to see funds diverted from services people need to mandate duplicative functions.

The Arc supports SB 245 as it will require OPM to consult with stakeholders on a plan to close DDS facilities. 15 states and DC have already done this. These facilities are expensive and impermissibly segregate people because of their disabilities. It is time that they close. It is possible that this bill will bring that day closer.

The Arc supports HB 5808 but do not want to see any funding diverted from services.

Finally, the Arc supports H.B. 5661, which would reduce costs and enhance administrative and operational efficiencies for accredited community nonprofits community and the state. Given that community provider funding is constantly being cut by the State, anything that can safely reduce costly regulatory burdens is welcome.

H.B. 5661 would allow nonprofits to forego duplicative and burdensome state licensing requirements if they can demonstrate accreditation from an accepted national accrediting body. The requirements of these nationally recognized accrediting organizations meet and often exceed state licensing requirements, as they demand extremely rigorous service standards and performance elements. Lessening the regulatory burden in this manner is a rational and thoughtful step.