

Testimony of Thomas Fiorentino, President
Arc of Connecticut Board of Directors
Before the Public Health Committee
March 18, 2018

I am Tom Fiorentino, President of the Arc of Connecticut board of directors, and the father of a 27 year old son with an intellectual disability who lives with my wife and me in West Hartford. The Arc is the state's largest and oldest family-based advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am here to testify on three bills, RB 296 (An Act Establishing a Pilot Program to Serve People Seeking Residential Services from the Department of Developmental Services), RB 400 (An Act Concerning Graduate Funding and the Provision of Support and Services for Persons with Intellectual Disability) and RB 463 (An Act Concerning the Development of a Facilities and Resources Plan for Persons with Intellectual Disability).

Raised Bill 296- So many of you have asked, during these difficult budget times, how you could help those with I/DD. Raised Bill 296, a bill that will operate under existing appropriations, is something you can do that will help.

It is something you can do to signal that you recognize the same thing that has been recognized by advocates, by families, and by the relevant state agencies: the system as currently configured is not sustainable, and desperately needs to broaden the options available to those with I/DD.

It is our hope that RB 296 will help unleash the potential energy and creativity that we know exists in both the non-profit provider

community and in the new leadership team at DDS, to better and more efficiently serve those with I/DD. There is a better way forward. This bill will put us on this path.

RB 400- The Arc of Connecticut supports RB 400's mandate that Day and Employment Services be fully funded and that the Governor be prohibited from reducing the allotment once made. I cannot overstate the damage and angst cause by the constant threats to either defund or cut this program. Life for our families is difficult enough without their having to, on what is becoming an annual basis, deal with the possibility that their children will have nowhere to go at the end of their school careers.

We will also support the calls for an increase in funding for non-profit providers. The growing disparity between the compensation paid to public and non-profit employees who do the same job with the same competence, is staggering, unfair, and demoralizing.

RB 463- I understand and sympathize with the intent, as I understand it, of those behind this bill. The problem of people with I/DD and behavioral and psychological problems, and those who develop other cognitive impairments, is real and needs action. But RB 463, with its clear- even if unintended- institutional bias, is not the way forward.

Given their disproportionate cost, and as important, their stultifying effect on people with I/DD (something demonstrated by every longitudinal study ever done), Connecticut's steadfast defense of its institutions is confounding.

Many states- states with precisely the same I/DD population as Connecticut- have completely eliminated institutions. More are on the way to eliminating them. But not Connecticut.

Despite the fact that our per person per year costs at our regional centers is close to \$500,000 per person per year- and despite the fact that the State claims a lack of funds to justify cut after cut to vital programs- Connecticut simply will not join the 21st century and close its institutions and reallocate the funds to expand services in the community.

As bad as the current situation is, RB 463 compounds it by calling for the “repurposing” of nursing homes and rehabilitation centers. Or put another way, calls for the creation of more institutions in a system that is already collapsing under the weight of its existing institutions.

It is interesting to note that our own Commissioner of DSS, in testimony concerning Money Follows the Person before the Human Services Committee, reported that seniors served in the community rather than in insitutional nursing homes, saved the State over \$2500 per person per month in Medicaid costs. A move to create more institutions is in contravention of the State’s own public policy of serving its citizens in the community rather than in segregative, costly institutions.

So again, while I am sympathetic to those who brought this very real problem to the attention of the Committee, I do not agree with the proposed solution, as any realistic and sustainable answer must be grounded in a community-based, rather than an institution- based, system of services and supports.