Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Gov. Bill No. 7148 (An Act Concerning the State Budget for the biennium ending June 13, 2021, and making appropriations therefor).

I am the president of the Arc Connecticut Board of Directors. The Arc is the state’s largest and oldest advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Our chapters provide direct services to thousands of Connecticut citizens in every part of the state. I am also a member of the Medicaid Long Term Services & Supports Rebalancing Initiatives Steering Committee Meeting, and chair of the Community First Choice subcommittee.

I am also, and most important, the very proud father of a 28 year old son with I/DD who lives with my wife and me in West Hartford.

I am very pleased this year to be asking you to support Governor Lamont’s proposed budget for the Department of Developmental Services (DDS).

It is a very substantial step forward from past budgets. It shows that this administration has listened to the I/DD community and fashioned a budget that not only meets some of its more critical
needs; it also begins the long, long overdue pivot to community-based living for people with I/DD.

For far too long, and at great and unnecessary cost in both dollars and anguish, Connecticut has clung to an outdated and thoroughly discredited model for delivering services to people with I/DD.

The proposed budget contains initiatives that finally demonstrate that Connecticut is ready to join the 21st century. This includes an increased emphasis on Money Follows the Person (MFP), something that can and should be used to further limit institutions; and a proposal to fund 70 new supportive housing units in the communities where people with I/DD want to live.

Moreover, this budget provides full funding for day and employment programs for all of our students who are graduating from our local schools. I cannot tell you how grateful we are for this funding, particularly given that the last biennial budget cruelly proposed eliminating all funding for all new graduates.

In addition, the budget funds an initiatives to address crises before they become the kind of problems that end up in the very expensive, and in many cases, very inappropriate emergency departments of our hospitals.

To this end, Commissioner Scheff has vigorously advocated for the step up/step down program that would provide an appropriate intervention before the person decompensated to the point of requiring hospitalization. This program, in the long run will save money at the same time it saves families.

In conclusion, I want to say this.
One of the most difficult things to endure over the past several years has been the sense of relentless hopelessness created by cut after cut, and pronouncement after pronouncement that as bad as things are now they will get worse.

Our leaders owe us more than that.

In difficult times, it seems to me that the very essence of leadership is to give people hope. To give them a reason to push on from one day to the next. To give them some tangible proof that their plight has been recognized, and that their government is working with them to alleviate their suffering.

So I urge your support for the DDS budget because of the funding it provides for the various programs I mentioned.

But as important, I urge your support because, for the first time in years, this DDS budget gives our community hope.