March 1, 2019

To Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am submitting this testimony to comment on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor. I am sorry that I am unable to attend in person.

Please protect and fully fund essential community services. Community nonprofits improve our quality of life, making Connecticut a better place to live and work. What should be equally important to these budget conversations is that we are providing necessary services at a fraction of the cost of similar state-run programs.

Bristol Adult Resource Center, or BARC as we are commonly known, has been a part of the greater Bristol community since 1957. Parents started our agency in order to provide community-based services for their children with developmental disabilities. We currently provide supports to approximately 150 individuals in our day programs and 41 people in our residential programs. We employ over 200 staff to provide these services. I feel very privileged to provide the services that these parents so deeply desired for their children.

Several years ago, BARC was forced to eliminate some services (in-home supports and personal supports) because they were cost prohibitive. This means that some of our local individuals need to contract elsewhere, and not their local agency, for these services.

We appreciate that in the face of another difficult budget year Governor Lamont has sought to limit the budget impact on people served by my, and other, nonprofits. But after so many years of difficult budgets, we still need your help. Years of limited funding have put increasing pressure on our community nonprofit and others like us, and I ask that you build upon the Governor’s proposals.

As you know, more than half of the state budget comprises “fixed costs” which are not subject to cuts. That percentage grows each year, and we appreciate the Governor’s tackling those costs. Funding for nonprofits is in whatever remains. The combination of ongoing budget shortfalls and growing fixed costs mean community nonprofits are a shrinking piece of a diminishing pie.

Nonprofits are dependent on the State for funding and have limited options in the face of budget shortfalls. We can’t raise taxes or charges. This is a model that cannot sustain itself. And the people we support deserve better.

You can maximize limited state funding by shifting more expensive state-operated programs into the community. The State must decide: either keep the expensive status quo and serve fewer people or change the system and serve more people in need. Community nonprofits can reduce state costs and meet the demand for services if you first take the necessary steps.

I truly appreciate your consideration of this testimony, and I would love to show you the programs and services that BARC provides if you are ever in the Bristol neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Mary Etter, Executive Director