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

I am Stan Soby, Chair of the Camp Harkness Advisory Committee, submitting this testimony on the Committee’s behalf. Please accept these comments on H.B. 7148, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021.

Under Sec. 17a-217a. of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Camp Harkness Advisory Committee is established to advise the Commissioner of Developmental Services with respect to issues concerning the health and safety of persons who attend and utilize the facilities at Camp Harkness, promote communication regarding camp services, and develop recommendations for the Commissioner regarding the use of Camp Harkness.

Members of the Committee include users of Camp Harkness, parents, family or guardians of someone using the Camp and representatives of the Summer Camp Providers: the Arc of Eastern Connecticut, Oak Hill, Southbury Training School and UCP of Greater Hartford, appointed by either the Governor or one of the Legislative Leaders.

Camp Harkness is located in Southeastern Connecticut on the shores of Long Island Sound. The 102-acre property in Waterford CT is comprised of open and wooded land and includes tidal marsh and beachfront. It is one of the few state parks in the country dedicated for exclusive use by citizens with disabilities, accompanied by their family and friends. Facilities at Camp Harkness include year-round and seasonal cabins, year-round cottages, seasonal tent sites, barnyard animals and horseback riding, picnic pavilions & grills, accessible playscape, scenic walkway and overlook, bathhouse, beach with seasonal boardwalk, gardens, dining hall, lodge, and infirmary. Camp Harkness is open year-round, although many of the programs and facilities are seasonal. Camp Harkness is owned by the State of Connecticut and managed by the Department of Developmental 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 DDS, including the thousands who use and benefit from the facilities and programs at Camp Harkness. We appreciate the support Camp has received from Commissioner Scheff and his staff. We respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee supports the DDS budget submitted by the Administration, so that the joy that so many have experienced at Camp can be experienced by as many of Connecticut's citizens with disabilities as possible.

Of note, we just yesterday celebrated the 70th birthday and 50 years of camping at Harkness of one of our members. Future campers and their families are being served now by the Playgroup that meets at Camp.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.