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

I am Andrea Barton Reeves, President and CEO of Harc, Inc., a 67-year old family-founded organization that supports people with intellectual disabilities and their families throughout the lifespan. Serving over 2200 people from Birth to Three to the elderly, we promote quality, dignity and inclusion in the lives of everyone we serve.

I am here to comment on H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

We appreciate that in the face of another difficult budget year Governor Lamont has sought to limit the budget impact on people served by Harc and other nonprofits. But after so many years of difficult budgets, there is more to do and we are here to ask you to 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. But funding for nonprofits is in whatever remains.

The families and participants we serve need the essential services provided by Harc and similar agencies. Yet year after year, not for profits have borne the brunt of the state’s budget crises. Demand for services continue increase while resources to meet those demands have endured staggering cuts. Human Services, particularly behavioral services and supports for people with intellectual disabilities are essential services that must be held harmless even in the most challenging budget years. With the increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism, the exponential growth of opioid epidemic and its devastating effect on children and families, the state must assure that its not for profit human services partners are thriving. Their long-term sustainability can be
assured by entering into contracts that pay a fair market rate for the cost of services. The not for profit community employs over 14 percent of all working people in Connecticut and provides services that keep families intact, keep older adults active in their communities, support those re-entering their communities after incarceration as well as a whole host of Connecticut residents that need support to live with dignity and inclusion. In this biennium and in subsequent years, please do all you can to assure the sustainability of the not for profit human services network as essential services fairly paid and not subject to any further reductions in funding.

To that end, in this biennium, we support the Governor’s proposal to fund caseload growth for Employment and Day Services, proposing over $30 million in the next two fiscal years for people with disabilities in need of day services and employment opportunities. In addition, we appreciate the Governor’s proposal to support caseload growth for residential services in the DSS budget, as the needs for employment and housing for people with disabilities are among the most urgent needs for this population.

I would also like to thank you for the legislation that increased wages for direct care professionals, passed at the end of last legislative session. In many cases, Direct Support Professionals had not received pay increases in over seven years, yet remained deeply dedicated to the people we serve. We support the Governor’s proposal to annualize funding for private provider wage adjustments, an expenditure of $17.4 million in each Fiscal Year, but providers are concerned that the appropriation is not sufficient to fully fund the increases in statute, on which many employees are depending.

Special Act 18-5 increased the minimum wage paid to private providers of DDS services to $14.75 and provided a wage increase of 5% to anyone else making between $14.75 and $30 an hour. The legislature appropriated approximately $10.8 million for that increase in the current fiscal year, which went into effect on January 1, 2019.

After applying the available appropriations to all eligible agencies, in many cases there is not enough funding available to providers to pay for the costs of fully implementing the increases. Importantly, Special Act 18-5 requires a wage
increase of “up to five percent” for employees making between $14.75 and $30 an hour. In some cases, increases of significantly less than 5% are being funded.

We are grateful that the legislature recognizes the immeasurable value of direct support professionals, and demonstrating your appreciation for their commitment to the profession by providing long-awaited and deserved pay increases. In order to continue to honor this commitment, we ask that the legislature appropriate enough funding to pay for the full costs of the increases they passed into law.

We appreciate that the state’s budget concerns are significant and daunting, but we believe that with a strong partnership with the not for profit human services community, we can be an answer to some of the state’s budget concerns by continuing to deliver quality services at fair market rates while enhancing the quality of life for all of Connecticut’s residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Respectfully,

Andrea Barton Reeves
President and CEO
Harc, Inc.