Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Human Services Subcommittee
March 5, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Somers, Representative Case and distinguished members of the Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Amy Porter, Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of the Governor’s proposed biennial budget for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. I would like to start by saying that we are very grateful for Governor Lamont’s support for our important work with older adults and people with disabilities.

Background

DORS continues to transform to meet the needs of Connecticut’s citizens with disabilities, and with the recent addition of Aging Services, we are building a strong continuum of aging and disability services. Our new mission is “to maximize opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut” and all of our core programs and services support this mission.

We have a diverse set of services that generally fall into five categories: employment, education, independent living, access and advocacy. We deliver these services with an incredible staff of approximately 450 dedicated professionals. DORS operates with a budget of approximately $95 million, almost three quarters of which comes from the federal government. On a state level, we receive funding from the General Fund, the Workers’ Compensation Fund and the Insurance Fund. On a federal level, we receive funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Social Security Administration.

The Governor’s proposed budget for our Department in FY 2020 and 2021 largely mirrors the budget for FY 2018 and 2019. I would like to take this opportunity to describe the one proposed change that goes beyond the baseline adjustments common to all executive branch agencies.

Annualize FY 2019 Holdbacks

The Department had one holdback in FY 2019, and this holdback has been annualized in the proposed budget for FY 2020 and 2021. This was in the area of Elderly Nutrition.

To provide some background on this program, the Department’s Elderly Nutrition Program provides congregate meals – meals in a community setting – to adults age 60 and over, their spouses (regardless of age), and individuals with disabilities residing in elderly housing complexes which have a congregate café on site. The Department’s Elderly Nutrition Program also provides home delivered meals to adults age 60 and older who are homebound or otherwise isolated. The program is supported by both state
and federal funds. The Elderly Nutrition Program does not have income or asset restrictions, nor is it an entitlement program. The Program is targeted to older adults with the greatest economic need (those with incomes below the federal poverty level) or the greatest social need (non-economic factors which include physical and mental disabilities, language barriers, and cultural, social or geographical isolation). Individuals who use DSS’ Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders are not eligible for meals through our Department’s Elderly Nutrition Program although we do serve people waiting to be determined eligible for the DSS program. Our Department contracts with Connecticut’s five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) who, in turn, contract with Elderly Nutrition Providers (ENPs) based on a competitive bid process.

The Elderly Nutrition program has been able to maintain stable service levels within available appropriations. In FFY 2018, the program provided 1,868,817 home-delivered and congregate meals to 21,509 individuals. In the previous fiscal year (FFY 2017), 1,874,570 home-delivered and congregate meals were provided to 20,584 individuals. The contracts are designed to be flexible enough to adapt to these changing numbers.

**Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of Governor Lamont’s recommended biennial budget. I would be happy to answer any questions.