



P.O. Box 470 • Norwalk, CT 06852-0470

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chapter of



**March 25, 2021**  
**Human Services Committee**  
**Public Hearing on:**  
**H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding**

Good afternoon distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Katie Banzhaf. I am the Executive Director of STAR Inc., Lighting the Way... a nonprofit organization supporting children, youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Our services include early intervention, school to work transition, job training and employment services, adult day and senior supports and residential programs.

With a budget of just over \$14M we support over 500 families annually in Fairfield County. 81% or \$11.4 Million comes through the Department of Developmental Services which includes the Medicaid match.

I am here today to provide support of **H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding**. Connecticut is set to receive a significant increase in federal matching funds for Medicaid, including a 10% increase for Home and Community Based Services as well as the continuation of the 6.2% increase that began in the spring of 2020. While nonprofit providers were allocated and we are grateful for a portion of the Coronavirus Relief Fund, those funds were spent months ago, and the State has not used the increased federal Medicaid match to increase rates or otherwise compensate providers. We are struggling.

**Community nonprofits like STAR have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic.** Our residential programs did not close their doors. We have continued to meet the needs of our residents and their families despite the risks and challenges of Covid -19.

Our day programs within weeks pivoted to a full 6 hrs. per day remote service programming and continued to offer in-person services for those for whom it was safe. Many of our client workers continued working throughout the crisis in their essential jobs in community supermarkets other services.

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**MAIN OFFICE**  
182 Wolfpit Avenue  
Norwalk, CT 06851  
Tel: (203) 846-9581  
Fax: (203) 847-0545

**RUBINO FAMILY CENTER**  
120 East Avenue  
Norwalk, CT 06851  
Tel: (203) 855-0634  
Fax: (203) 855-0637

[www.starct.org](http://www.starct.org)

STAR has spent over \$1.2 M to date in Covid related expenses, including the purchase of PPE, cleaning supplies as well as ServPro Services for disinfecting after an exposure, plastic for social distancing, etc. We have had an increase in overtime as we work to minimize exposure in the home, to provide the best possible medical care when a resident is ill, and to cover staff shortages.

Today, I am here to tell you that we are facing a huge crisis in our state.

A crisis of staff shortages has only been exacerbated by the onset of Covid 19.

As you know, we have requested that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over the next five years for community nonprofits to address the low wage issue. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services.

STAR has and continues to raise more than \$1M a year in grants and contributions to maintain our serves.

While our donors are generous, we cannot rely on them year after year to address the lack of incremental rate changes each year that would allow us to recruit and retain skilled staff.

With an influx of funds through a rate change, agencies like STAR can begin to manage our programs with a vision for the future. We will be able to recruit staff who will know that they are not accepting a \$14.75 hr. job that will challenge them every day and will be rewarded and recognized with a 0% wage increase year after year.

This year I come before you with a story staff of remarkable staff that stood strong during the worst pandemic we faced in our lifetime. They are real heroes, praised often in the media, but still they cannot support a family, own a home, get their cars repaired without a loan from their pension, or even feed their families without holding 2 or 3 jobs to simply get by.

Word must be out – because I hear from all across the state how each agency is facing staffing shortages, lack of qualified recruits and extremely highly turnover. It is a crisis that needs to be addressed.

**The enhanced FMAP is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Connecticut General Assembly to address these needs– let's not let it pass us by.**

On behalf of the STAR Board of Directors, families serviced and staff, I urge the Committee to support H.B. 6636.



Katie Banzhaf  
Executive Director