



Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Berthel, Representative Case and members of the Human Services Committee:

I am Pam Fields, CEO at MidState Arc. Our Agency supports 300 people with intellectual disabilities throughout central CT to live fully integrated in their communities in employment, housing, volunteering, recreation and retirement with a specialty in utilizing Assistive Technology for successful moves to greater independence.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of H.B. 6636 An Act Concerning COVID-19 and Enhanced Federal Medicaid Funding**. The American Rescue Plan is expected to bring \$10 billion into Connecticut, with over \$4 billion going directly to state and local governments. 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 a portion of the Coronavirus Relief Fund, those funds were spent months ago.

Community nonprofits have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like many, MidState Arc never closed their doors and have been meeting the needs of the people we support despite the risks. COVID-19 brought unanticipated and unbudgeted costs well over a million dollars and operational challenges that have stretched our resources and exhausted our staffing.

We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on making our environments safer for the people we support. Many of whom are at a higher risk for contracting COVID and are unable to maintain expectations of social distancing and mask wearing. These upgrades and changes included installing no touch points on all entry ways, bathrooms and service areas; eliminating any areas that promote group gatherings; hunting day in and day out for PPE equipment to keep our staff safe including driving across the state to pick it up and having staff make cloth masks in the beginning because we could not get supplies; revamping our transportation network to ensure social distancing. Investing in disinfecting products and services for all of our programs homes and vehicles; redesigning program environments to address social distancing and reconfiguring how to conduct engaging activities; eliminating our major goals and direction of community connections to keep people safe, but continuing to provide job coaching supports people who were working during this time. MidState like all the other agencies has created virtual supports and ensured all of the people supported have access to video capabilities for social connectedness, programmatic purposes and medical meetings. We have developed new policies and procedures over 70 pages long and rolled out extensive training programs for all of our employees. In addition to all

those safety measures we invested in programs for employees to address increased depression, stress levels and other associated issues during this pandemic. The use of our employee assistance program increased by 158%. MidState Arc worked with staff on how to help manage working and home schooling their children and dealing with multiple quarantines. And lastly to incentivize employees and keep people working MidState provided hazard pay for essential workers on the front lines with a higher risk of exposure.

As you may know, community nonprofits have **requested that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over the next five years for community nonprofits**. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least this much in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. COVID-19 has only exacerbated those challenges.

This lack of funding has contributed to the staffing crisis going around out state and nation. It is easier and less stressful for staff to work at Walmart and Amazon then to provide hands on support, dispensing medications, managing feeding tubes and colostomy bags and dealing with cases of extreme aggressive behaviors. We were so grateful when the legislature worked to resolve the problem by appropriating the increase in DSP salaries to \$14.75 to create a wage gap between minimum wage and our direct support professionals. It was a step in the right direction. I would say we are quickly moving in right back to where we were however, since COVID-19 exacerbated the situation and has caused many staff and management to leave the field we are left with a crisis situation.

Because a substantial portion of the \$461 million restoration for community nonprofits will be to provide increased Medicaid rates, the **enhanced FMAP is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Connecticut General Assembly to address these needs**. This influx of federal funding combined with the state's strong Rainy Day Fund, and more than \$400 million in unexpended Medicaid funds, puts the state in the unique position to use those funds to directly support nonprofit programs and fulfill their needs without complicating the state budget process.

Congress intended for the American Rescue Plan to help Americans across the country get to the other side of COVID-19, and this bill would provide significant support to help community nonprofits emerge from COVID-19 stronger and more ready to meet the needs of our communities.

I strongly urge the Committee to support H.B. 6636. Thanks you for your time and commitment to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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