

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

I am Patricia Gibney CEO at The Arc of Southington Inc. Our Agency supports 80 people with intellectual disabilities in Southington, Cheshire, Wallingford, New Britain, Meriden, and Hamden. We empower our individuals to live as independently as possible utilizing Assistive Technology.

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, The Arc of Southington never closed their doors and has 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 our individuals are at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19 and are unable to maintain expectations of social distancing and mask wearing. We have implemented procedures which include, eliminating any areas that promote group gatherings; hunting 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 adequate supplies. We have also invested in disinfecting products and services for all our program's homes and vehicles and a large freezer to store necessary food supply for our homes. We converted our office into a pandemic supply storage area. The Arc of Southington like all the other agencies has created virtual supports and ensured all the people supported have access to video capabilities for social connectedness, programmatic purposes, and medical meetings. We have installed cameras and ring doorbells for the safety and supervision of our individuals should we have limited staffing due to the virus. We have developed a COVID-19 guidelines that have been revised by our team several times, implemented new policies and procedures and rolled out extensive training programs for all of our employees. The Arc of Southington has 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 The Arc of Southington 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 our state and nation. It is easier and less stressful for staff to work at Walmart and Amazon than to provide hands on support, dispensing medications, managing 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.

Patricia Gibney
Chief Executive Officer
The Arc of Southington