



An Open Letter to Governor Malloy and Legislators

September 12, 2017

As the Connecticut's leaders work towards a new budget, Connecticut's citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families fear cuts that may irreparably damage their path toward a better life.

This fear is well founded. As of yesterday, none of the budget proposals released following the ratification of the SEBAC agreement fully fund community-based Employment and Day Services for new graduates of Connecticut's school systems, leaving hundreds of individuals with I/DD without a next step in life.

Instead, both budgets waste scarce resources by continuing to fund inefficient public institutions, public group homes and publicly-provided services even though the same quality supports could be provided at far less cost to taxpayers by private community providers. Any objective analysis of these budgets leads inexorably to the same conclusion: the interests of State employees are more important than the interests of the people they were hired to support and, more importantly, the thousands who currently seek support.

Employment and Day Services build on the hard work done throughout earlier schooling so that young adults with I/DD can continue to develop self-confidence, social, and pre-vocational skills. They enable many to lead productive lives in their communities by developing an identity based on their abilities rather than their disability.

Conversely, the absence of vocational or educational activity, and the accompanying lack of social interaction, is not a good scenario for any young adult. Parents of children with I/DD are especially concerned that hard-fought gains made in school will be wiped out by this State-imposed isolation from the community. And of course, the State's precipitous termination of this longstanding program will have additional consequences: some parents will have to leave their jobs and otherwise disrupt their families to make sure that their children, who have a wide variety of behavioral, cognitive and physical needs, are safe at home because their children will have nowhere to go.

We have come to a fork in the road in Connecticut. We can continue the woefully inefficient and shockingly inequitable status quo, where prohibitively expensive publicly-provided services are sacrosanct; or create a system where people with I/DD come first, and tax dollars are spent to expand services, rather than preserving state agency jobs.

Under both proposed budgets, waiting lists for all services will continue to grow as our elected officials have effectively put a "Closed for Business" sign on Connecticut's Department of Developmental Services for all new clients. How ironic that the only guarantees in these budgets are for the agency's employees.

It does not have to be this way.

There still is time to get our priorities straight. There are savings within DDS that could fund vital programs like Day and Employment. For example, "in just the first six months" of this year, 37 DDS employees made more than \$50,000, and 637 made more than \$20,000, in overtime! This is part of the \$45,000,000 in overtime spent by DDS this year, and will no doubt spend again next year.

How is preserving this kind of inefficiency more important than preserving Day and Employment? When will the "new fiscal reality" that has been used to justify devastating cuts to Connecticut's social safety net, be used to demand accountability at our state agencies?

So while there still is time to change, it will require a realignment of the prevailing moral compass. It will require a recognition, as you create a budget for people with I/DD, that their interests should come first; and that any other interests, including those of state workers, are secondary. The public interest you have sworn to uphold demands no less.

People with I/DD are counting on you to do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Win Evarts
Executive Director

Tom Fiorentino
President