



## Testimony Appropriations Committee – February 13, 2008

Senator Harp, Representative Merrill & members of the Committee; my name is Patrick Johnson. I am President of Oak Hill and Vice Chairman of CCPA. I am here this evening to request that you please support the Community Provider Rescue Fund. I recently served on jury duty and the judge gave us instructions to consider what a reasonable person would do under the circumstances. I am asking you to consider what I am supposed to do under these circumstances.

Oak Hill is the largest private community based provider of services to people with disabilities in CT with 110 sites occupied by people with severe disabilities who can not live independently in 59 towns. Their lives are literally in our hands 24/7. DDS tells us that if they need additional nursing care or supervision we are to provide it. Last year we had to increase the salaries of our nurses in order to retain them. We have had nursing vacancies for over a year. The state does not recognize this reality and yet we know that if something goes wrong we will have our good name all over the newspaper even though we are telling you that state reimbursement is inadequate. Our energy costs went up 84% in the past five years and health care increased “only” 34% because we are assuming more of the risk. We are being subjected to increased levels of scrutiny and unfunded mandates that clearly exceed the resources available. Licensing and inspection personnel can cite us for shortcomings but expect us to fund services with zero. What would a reasonable person do????

We are doing strategic planning at my agency over the next two months and how much services we can continue to provide will depend on what happens in this legislative session. We cannot in good conscience leave beautiful people with severe disabilities in the cold, in the dark, hungry, unsafe, and uncared for. That’s what the state did a short forty years ago at Mansfield Training school and we are back on the downward spiral again and ultimately any private provider with a conscience and a commitment to quality care can not go there. What reasonable person would think that twenty years with a 1.4% increase per year is adequate to sustain quality care?

We again see some disabled people begging on the street. Our clients can’t do that so private providers have become the surrogate beggars. So here I am again, cup in hand, begging powerful people to care enough about our most vulnerable neighbors to make sure that they are safe, leading lives with dignity, and well cared for. If ever there was a responsibility of a civil society since the passage of the Elizabethan Poor Laws a few hundred years ago, this is it.

Disabled people and those community agencies that serve them are made to feel like the catfish of our culture; the bottom feeders who are made to beg and plead for help far below the cost of living and inadequate to cover the cost of their care every year. This process is unjust, disrespectful, and dehumanizing. I know some of you have come to meet the people we serve and visit our programs and see for yourself how demanding and important this work is. I invite all of you to please do that.

In good times we are told that the spending cap can not be exceeded and in hard times we are told there is no money. Well a reasonable person would assume that the spending cap was never intended to limit essential service and proposing new spending when basic services are under funded does not seem reasonable. We ask this year that you do what a reasonable person would do when they see vulnerable people at risk; step in and help them through the Community Provider Rescue Fund.

**Patrick J. Johnson Jr., President of Oak Hill**

Eleanor A. Brooks  
Blindness Related Supports  
Center at  
Oak Hill

The Hartford Artisans’  
Center  
at Oak Hill

Individual and Family  
Supports Center at  
Oak Hill

The NEAT Center  
at Oak Hill

Oak Hill Birth to  
Three Program

Oak Hill Camp

Oak Hill Center for  
Relationship & Sexuality  
Education

Oak Hill Day Services

Oak Hill Foundation, Inc.

Oak Hill Professional  
Development

Oak Hill Residential  
Services

Oak Hill School

120 Holcomb Street  
Hartford, CT 06112

Tel (860)242-2274  
Fax (860)242-3103

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