

Community providers make progress

Published Friday, February 3, 2012

Op-Ed by Martin Schwartz

The Legislature's Program Review and Investigations ([PRI](#)) Committee issued a report in late December on the "Provision of [Selected Services for Clients](#) with Intellectual Disabilities." The committee, charged with examining the effectiveness of state government programs, undertook the work of researching the efficiency of Connecticut's care delivery system for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Their conclusions and recommendations supported the assertion that community care providers are an efficient and high quality mechanism for providing these services to state residents. In fact, the committee staff said the "quality of residential services is superior in the private sector."

Those of us who have had the privilege to work as community providers have always known that we can deliver human services in a manner that not only benefits our consumers but also benefits the state. Our safety net services have proven time and time again that there is a cost-effective and efficient way to assist people with mental and physical disabilities in leading meaningful and productive lives. The [PRI committee](#) recognized the benefits of this method as they examined the community provider system. They focused their evaluation on residential care and its cost, the day/work program and its costs, new rate structures and quality assurance. Private providers excelled in meeting those standards.

The committee co-chair, state Rep. [T.R. Rowe](#) of the 123rd District, was instrumental in advocating for the study. We are thankful for his leadership and for the consideration of the Committee members as they undertook this process. The committee approved this study and has decided to support a bill to implement its findings. A public hearing has been tentatively scheduled at the [State Capitol](#) on Feb. 21 at 1 p.m.

We believe there is an opportunity for state government, as a result of this study, to take advantage of the private provider structure and give it the support it needs to meet the challenges of current demand.

The report did not, however, address the chronic underfunding of private providers or provide a remedy for assuring that privatized services don't atrophy due to insufficient funding. As costs have risen and reimbursement rates have remained flat, our infrastructure needs have often been deferred in the interest of maintaining programs and retaining employees. Electronic medical records and other IT infrastructure costs, emergency preparedness, these all are necessary expenditures and yet community providers struggle to balance those needs with those of our clients.

Gov. Malloy has recognized our position. Just a few weeks ago he made an announcement that will help community providers significantly -- streamlining the state contracting process. Initiatives such as these, along with the recommendations of the PRI committee members, demonstrate state government's readiness to help modernize the safety net so that community providers can continue to do what we do best -- care for the state's most vulnerable residents.

We look forward to working with the Legislature and the administration this year to enact the recommendations of the PRI committee and other solutions that will support services provided in community-based settings as alternatives to more costly and restrictive systems of care.

Martin D. Schwartz is president and CEO of [The Kennedy Center](#) in Trumbull.