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MORE THAN 6,000 FAMILIES ASK FOR TOWN HALL MEETING WITH GOVERNOR RELL

Meeting Would Discuss the Need for Support of the Community Provider System that Serves Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and Other Significant Needs

Governor M. Jodi Rell has been presented with petitions signed by more than 6,000 people asking for a town hall meeting with her to discuss services for children and adults with developmental disabilities and other significant needs.

Parents and families of individuals with special needs, feel the system of private providers and state agencies set up to care for individuals with developmental disabilities, is poorly funded and on the verge of collapse. Each year, parents and other family members, have to fight harder and harder to provide the basic services that help them maintain an acceptable quality of life for their loved ones.

"Many of us have spent years, indeed decades, working with the Community Provider Agencies as volunteers on Boards, and in their programs. We now see they are in crisis due to continued under funding from the State, in an environment of rising costs. We have lobbied; testified; written letters; held rallies, and otherwise tried to make the needs of these agencies that support our family members known. Conditions are getting worse and we are alarmed. We have determined that the only way to affect change is to have a direct meeting with the Governor on our issues," said Mickey Herbst, parent. "Frankly, we need to know that she understands the true extent of the problem. Presently, we aren't sure she does. We are tired of fighting the battle, and continuing to lose ground." Family members are very concerned that the growing state budget deficit will give political leaders at the Capitol another excuse to ignore the needs of their loved ones with developmental disabilities.

State government has not addressed the need for adequate funding to meet the cost of vital care for thousands of people with disabilities. The community provider agencies that support our loved ones have been grossly underfunded for over 20 years and continue to struggle to meet the needs of individuals in their care in light of a 0% increase this year. Their costs go up for staffing, fuel, food, electricity, insurance and other costs

of running a business. However, state funding hasn't come close to meeting those costs of services. The Consumer Price Index has increased by over 95% in the last 20 years while the increase in state funding to community providers has been less than 30%.

People with developmental disabilities often need one on one, twenty-four hour care. The routines that help them maintain a quality of life can be severely impacted by the constant staff turnover that results from under-funding the system. In addition, the state is in the process of implementing reforms related to a new provider reimbursement system that will put new burdens on families and service providers to get proper funding and services to care for their loved ones.

“The struggles facing individuals with developmental disabilities and their families have been out of the forefront of policy makers attention for too long and we believe hidden from the governor herself. That's why we are asking for a direct meeting with her, as soon as possible, so we can have a meaningful exchange on the issues and what to do about them,” said Suzanne Letso, parent.