

Good morning. My name is David Pickus and I am President of 1199 New England, SEIU. We represent 26,000 health care workers in Connecticut. 10,000 of our members provide care through the Department of Developmental Services as public employees, private agency workers and home care workers. 1199 is a major stakeholder in DDS and how services are delivered.

At 1199 we are uniquely positioned to speak about the issues facing DDS because we represent workers in both the public and private sector. Many of the people from the industry you will be hearing from today are exclusively from either private or public sector.

For the last 15 years DDS has failed to develop a coherent plan of action for the clients in its charge. There has been a haphazard approach to deinstitutionalization and privatization of group homes. The private sector has been grossly underfunded and the refusal to address the state's growing waiting list is unconscionable.

DDS must stop using the waiting list crisis as a political football. Promising desperate parents that all their hopes lie in closing certain homes or laying off certain workers is not a plan. Expanding programs and funding services for those on the waiting list should be a top priority of this department.

A study partnered by the University of California Berkley and University of Connecticut found that low-wage workers in our state access \$486 million in public assistance annually. That amount is almost a third of our total projected budget deficit. As I mentioned we represent workers in the private sector and we know that these workers are among the low-wage workers seeking public assistance because their \$11, \$12 an hour job is not enough to make ends meet. Our state's solution to the budget deficit should not be turning middle class tax payers into the working poor. If we are serious about providing quality

care to people with disabilities then you have to be serious about providing the proper funding to pay a living wage to these workers. Otherwise, we increase the number of working poor, the cost of public assistance increases and high turnover causes lower quality care for clients.

DDS employs 2,500 employees and there is a unique opportunity to build toward the future needs of people with disabilities. Last year 1199 proposed a thoughtful policy approach to the current budget challenges and needs of DDS. We maintain that a public/private system must be continued and improved upon. Similar to DMHAS the plan found ways to utilize the trained workforce DDS has already invested in while helping to get services to those desperately in need of it. I strongly urge you to revisit and adopt the policies we recommended last year.

Connecticut has the resources to support public and private services of the highest standards. We must develop a 21st century tax system that provides sustainable revenue. And we can no longer afford to continue to subsidize the low wages of Walmart and other large corporations.

The DDS system of care must remain a core governmental function. We strongly demand that you postpone any of these decisions until you sit down with stakeholders, including guardians, clients and the workers on the front lines providing care. Only together will we move forward and develop a plan that is in the best interest of clients, families and workers.