



State of Connecticut
Department of Aging and Disability Services

Amy Porter, Commissioner

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 22, 2023

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee - my name is Amy Porter and I am Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS). I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Governor Lamont's recommended budget, H.B. 6659, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

We are grateful that Governor Lamont's proposed biennial budget maintains our agency's ability to achieve our mission of maximizing opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut and allows our dedicated staff to deliver integrated aging and disability services responsive to the needs of Connecticut citizens. With this budget, we can continue to focus on the areas of employment, education, independent living, accessibility and advocacy through our major bureaus, which include the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, the Bureau of Disability Determination and the Bureau of Aging Services, which includes our State Unit on Aging and our Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

Building on our successful internal integration of aging and disability services, ADS will heighten our focus on the integration of people with disabilities and older adults into some of Connecticut's key initiatives, including the state's workforce efforts, work-based learning initiatives, digital equity efforts and the state's long-term care services and supports system.

To achieve these goals, we will use our state funding from this recommended budget to continue leveraging federal funding for our work. Our total ADS operating budget is approximately \$115 million, 70% of which comes from federal sources, including the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor and the Social Security Administration.

Most of the changes to our recommended budget are baseline changes applicable to all state agencies, including the annualization of wage agreements, removing funding for the 27th payroll, annualizing private provider COLA funding, and adjustments for inflation. The budget also includes a change to fringe benefits in our Workers' Compensation Fund budget to align with wage increases in that account.

We also appreciate the recognition in the Governor's recommended budget that there is a gap in advocacy and support for those who receive their long term supports and services at home rather than in a long-term care facility. The budget provides additional funding of \$98,000 for a community ombudsperson position, doubling the capacity of the community ombudsman function to enhance consumer outreach, respond to consumer complaints, track the number and

types of calls received and improve the quality of home- and community-based services for older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Beyond our traditional work and this new role in home- and community-based services, it is critical for ADS to maintain its support of the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was particularly difficult for people with disabilities and older adults. In partnership with the Governor, Executive Branch leadership and the legislature, we need to continue to mitigate the long-term impacts of COVID, including social isolation, disparities in healthcare access, technology challenges, workforce shortages, and continued unemployment or underemployment for those we serve and must remain dedicated to serving as a resource on aging and disability issues for Connecticut residents.

To this end, we are using Public Health Workforce (PHW) funds, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and COVID 19 Vaccine Access funds to address these long-term impacts. Some of this funding came directly from our federal partners, and some was allocated from the state's ARPA funds. The department's major initiatives in this area include support for Senior Centers, Area Agencies on Aging, Adult Day Centers, Respite Care Programs and Elderly Nutrition Programs, as well as efforts to bridge the digital divide and supports for the Deaf Community and the Blind Community.

This recommended budget and the resulting federal funding will allow us to continue our leadership in the areas of inclusion, choice and independence for people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut.

I thank you for your time and am available to answer any questions you may have.