

An open letter to those whose lives are touched by developmental disabilities: **Please take the time to consider the implications of this letter.**

The purpose of this letter is to urge everyone to recognize the depth of the crisis we now face, and to become actively engaged in defending the basic safety net of services that people with developmental disabilities and their families depend upon.

It is critical to realize that nearly all direct services and supports provided in California are delivered by local, community based nonprofit organizations, not by State offices or by Regional Center personnel. In many cases, these nonprofit organizations were founded by parents and other local community members who accepted their role in creating alternatives to the State operated institutions that characterized California's public policy regarding the developmentally disabled, as recently as 1970.

As parents organized into nonprofit organizations they began to raise money and hire local community members to work as direct support staff for their sons and daughters. California recognized the vast improvement in the quality of life offered by local community services and the enormous savings to tax payers offered by a service system based upon service delivery by local nonprofit organizations. In 1970, California began to convert the vast majority of its publicly funded service delivery system to a model based primarily upon contracting with local nonprofit organizations.

By contracting with local nonprofit organizations, rather than building and operating public facilities, California has saved billions of tax dollars over the last 40 years, while providing extraordinary services to its citizens with developmental disabilities.

But, because California did not establish a system for routinely assessing and adjusting its rates of reimbursement to its nonprofit partners, these rates have fallen further and further below the actual costs of providing the direct services that people need. As a result, local nonprofits have worked as hard as possible to raise additional funds to supplement State payments, and have stretched their operations as thin as possible to survive. This "stretching and struggling" has characterized the nonprofit service provider community for more than 20 years.

But, as the recent UCLA study concludes, the nonprofit community as a whole is now "on the ropes" with little reason for hope. Nonprofits have been hurt badly by the recession. Private fundraising has suffered, and, unlike the financial and manufacturing sectors, the public response has been cuts in funding rather than "bailouts".

http://www.spa.ucla.edu/ccs/docs/UCLA_civilsociety_2010_report.pdf

The proposed cut of \$750,000,000 in California's funding to the developmental disabilities community, on top of the previous years of cuts and freezes, will lead to the collapse of the nonprofit organizations the State relies upon to deliver services.

There is simply nothing left to cut. For the most part, these organizations are made up of large numbers of low wage direct service staff supervised by a small corps of managers who also work for far less than their public or private sector counterparts.

Given the undeniable needs of people with developmental disabilities served by these organizations, there is simply nothing left to take away. These community based organizations are being left to sort out how long they can continue to spend money they don't have to meet California's legal and ethical obligations. If, when, we fail, who will take our place? Will California step back in and create a new system of residential and day service direct care? Where would those funds come from, and is a costly and bureaucratic State system what we hope for?

To repeat, the purpose of this letter is to forewarn everyone who cares about the current and future welfare of people with developmental disabilities. If we permit the collapse of the nonprofit organizations that provide the actual services, we will have lost everything. Consumers, family members, friends, policy makers, the organizations that you depend upon now depend upon you.

Without delay, contact your own State Assemblymember and your State Senator. The message right now is simple:

“Please stop! just for a moment, and consider how deeply you cut last year and how seriously the safety-net has already been weakened. This new cut is too deep. The risks to people's lives are too real to make these cuts without first understanding their consequences and searching for alternatives”.