

# Legislators told of concern over disability services funding

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NEW BRITAIN — Clients and workers at local disability services organizations pleaded with political leaders Tuesday for more money for their programs, saying state funding has stagnated.

Members of the New Britain and Bristol legislative delegation and two area mayors heard pleas for money and support from six area disability services organizations Tuesday morning at the CCARC's annual legislative breakfast.

The six political leaders who attended the second annual breakfast at CCARC's headquarters on Slater Road heard testimonials from clients and their parents of the service organizations. They also were told the number one issue that needs to be addressed in Hartford is the cost of care.

“We have not had an increase in our contract with the state as it relates to cost of care for 10 years.” said Anne Ruwett, the chief executive of CCARC. The organization, which serves people from 16 area communities and receives about \$10 million a year from the state, has seen healthcare costs skyrocket during that time, Ruwett said.

The financial squeeze, she added, is real and CCARC “made a commitment to families that we’d provide life long care, specifically on the residential side, and we take that responsibility very seriously. Most of us depend on our state contracts.” CCARC has about 200 clients with various forms of disabilities ranging from Down’s Syndrome to intellectual disabilities. The group oversees about a dozen group homes.

New Britain state Sen. Terry Gerratana said she doesn’t know if state funding would increase, but added, “Anything is possible. The budget climate, given our surplus, is much more favorable now.”

Many of the 75 people who attended said CCARC — and the other care agencies — have made a difference in their lives and the lives of their loved ones.

Al Carrier, 88, said CCARC has been a godsend for his 59-year-old daughter Denise, who is mentally disabled.

“She lives in a group home in New Britain. CCARC has been a lifesaver,” Carrier said. “She’s been there for 10 years and she loves it. She says that’s her home. She gets 24-hour care. She is well taken care of. The state pays for her care.”

Whit Betts, a state representative from Bristol and Plymouth, echoed the theme of many political leaders that more will be done in this legislative session — which begins today — for programs and funding for mental health.

“There is much more interest in supporting mental health because of tragedies like Newtown,” Betts said. “A lot of tragedies you hear about are directly related to people with mental illnesses.”

Betts said he’d “try to build a coalition to make this (support for mental health) a priority for the next 10 years.”

Gerratana said she “expects legislative changes on mental health” this session.

In addition to Gerratana and Betts, also attending Tuesday were New Britain and Plainville state Rep. Betty Boukus; New Britain state Rep. Peter Tercyak; Mayor Erin Stewart; and Berlin Mayor Rachel J. Rochette.

In addition to CCARC, other disability service organizations represented were the Bristol Adult Resource Center; Community Mental Health Affiliate; CW Resources; CT Community Providers Association; and Wheeler Clinic.

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