



DATE: March 8, 2022
TO: Labor & Public Employees Committee
FROM: Jeff Shaw, Senior Public Policy Advisor, The Alliance
RE: HB-5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay For Essential Workers.

Good afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Senator Sampson, Representative Arora and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Jeff Shaw, Senior Public Policy Advisor, of the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing the nonprofit sector. Community nonprofits provide essential services to over half a million individuals and families in Connecticut every year and employ 115,000 Connecticut workers, improving the quality of life in communities across the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay For Essential Workers. The proposed legislation would provide a one-time payment for essential workers, including community nonprofit employees providing direct care, and other frontline workers, for their heroism throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community nonprofits are the backbone of the health and human services delivery system and, like other essential workers, have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic response and remain critically important to the State's long-term recovery. Throughout the crisis, nonprofit employees have been tirelessly working to ensure continuity and access to services including such services as supporting people with disabilities in residential and day treatment programs, delivering substance abuse and mental health treatments, providing shelter to people who are homeless or escaping domestic violence, and helping people re-enter the community from the criminal justice system.

The bill would provide a one-time payment of \$2,000 for full-time workers and \$1,000 for part-time workers, through a newly created Connecticut Essential Workers Payment Program managed by the Office of the Comptroller. The proposed \$750 million program would be available on a first-come, first-serve basis, and expire on June 30, 2024. It also compliments the Connecticut Essential Workers COVID-19 Assistance Fund, authorized by the legislature in June 2021, to ease the financial burden for essential workers who contracted COVID-19 and became ill and unable to work.

The proposed one-time payment program is an important recognition of a heroic workforce – but also one that is in crisis. According to a survey The Alliance released in January, nearly one in five (18%) nonprofit jobs are unfilled across Connecticut. The nationwide exodus from the healthcare industry has been well-documented, but it has hit Connecticut's nonprofits acutely. Staff are leaving for higher paying jobs in private industry and private practice, where they can deliver services remotely from their homes, and other industries (such as school districts) are hiring clinical staff away from community-based nonprofit providers.

While the proposed one-time payment will do little to alter this troubling trend, it shows the State is committed to investing in this critical workforce, though more is needed.

Please support HB-5356, an important step toward recognizing the heroic work of essential workers, including the many nonprofit providers that cared for - and continue to care for – the most vulnerable Connecticut residents.

Thank you.