

Connecticut has four state-operated intermediate care centers for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ICF/ID). The largest, Southbury Training School (STS), currently has a population of approximately 125. The residences are eight cottages around the 420-acre campus. Originally, there were 125 buildings on a 1,600-acre campus. STS has an aging IDD population, as the state legislature closed it to new admissions in 1986. At that point, there were 1,111 residents at the school.

Additionally, there are three regional centers housing approximately 150 persons. Several of them also provide respite services.

Connecticut also has several private ICFs, but most of the IDD population lives in their family home, their own home or apartment, or a group home.

As of July 1, 2022, annual increases in pension benefits for employees of STS and the regional centers were reduced and a large number of staff members retired. STS and the regional centers are actively recruiting new employees and vacancies are nearly filled. STS Director Eugene Harvey retired on April 1, 2022 and Kathy Hanewicz, his long-time assistant director, replaced him on that date.

Group homes in Connecticut, like similar facilities in most states, are suffering from severe staff shortages and considerable staff turnover. Several have closed.

On May 24, approximately 1,700 unionized group home workers went on strike against group homes run by six nonprofit agencies. The majority of the strikers earn \$17 to \$18 per hour and the union is seeking \$25. Management members at group homes have been working at the homes and non-union individuals have been hired, many at \$25 per hour. A new budget was approved on June 6 and the issue was not addressed and the strike continues. The legislative session ended on June 7 at midnight. Providers, some legislators and others continue to pressure Ct. Gov Ned Lamont to address the matter.

The strike is gaining national attention. Nobel prize winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz issued a statement of support, stating that his message is directed to Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont, but clearly gives a message to Governors in all states. The statement included the following:

“No publicly funded employee caring for others and working full time should be dependent on our welfare system... States must set standards for private employers that, when followed, relieve the pressure on welfare programs that merely prolong poverty. Raising wages for low-wage workers creates immediate savings in state budgets because they will no longer need to rely so heavily on public programs. It also stimulates the economy because we know middle-class workers will spend their raises as consumers of goods and services in our communities. Public dollars should be used to lift working people out of poverty, not keep them in poverty whether they are working on behalf of for-profit or nonprofit organizations.

“The costs of housing, healthcare, and childcare have increased rapidly, but wages for Black, Brown and white working-class caregivers have remained stagnant. Governor Ned Lamont needs to acknowledge that austerity policies have left the government ill-equipped to address the needs of our most vulnerable individuals. Failing to pay living wages to the workers who provide long-term care and essential services has weakened the economy as a whole.

“A healthy economy is one in which everyone has the economic security, support, and protection they need. A strong economy is one in which everyone prospers. It’s one built on the solid foundation of smart investments, and shared prosperity in recognition that all labor has dignity.” (<https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/connecticut-caregivers-strike-attracts-national-support-to-end-poverty-wages>)

According to one CT representative, there are currently 2,000 people on a waitlist for the autism waiver and more than 900 people on the waitlist for home and community-based services. A bill was approved and funded which seeks to address this situation, but it is obviously a work in progress.

On a much different note, Connecticut was one of the last states to still have a public (state-run) Protection and Advocacy Association (P&A). It was staffed mostly by members of the deaf and the blind communities. In 2021, Connecticut's P&A became a part of the National Disability Rights Network. As we all know, P&A's are subject to little or no state oversight. Disability Rights Connecticut has commenced activities relating to STS but, so far, has taken no significant action.

The Home and School Association of the Southbury Training School, an organization of family members and friends of STS residents, has, with the generous support of a state and a private organization, provided music, play and relaxation and gong sessions at STS for many years. Massage is also provided. All of these programs are very much enjoyed by STS residents.

- Marty Dwyer is the President of the Home and School Association. Hugo Dwyer is the Treasurer.