

REP. SAYERS: We'll now move on to Senate Bill 498. And I'm going to turn this over to Senator Handley.

SEN. HANDLEY: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's not a secret why I'm here to talk with all of the folks that are here from Manchester in the red shirts.

Welcome, welcome to all of you. Our first speaker on Senate Bill 498 is David Sheridan. Good afternoon.

DAVID SHERIDAN: Good afternoon. Thank you, Representative Sayers, and thank you to my Senator, Senator Handley, and thank you to the Members of the Committee.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify today regarding Raised Senate Bill 498. My name is David Sheridan. I am a Director of the Town of Manchester and have been so since 2001.

You have before you the written testimony of my colleague on the board of directors and our Mayor, Louis Spadaccini, who unfortunately could not be present today.

His testimony describes the private-public partnership that has existed for over 40 years between the Town of Manchester and [inaudible] and expressing the town's complete support of this MARC initiative.

In his absence, I'd be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have about the Town of Manchester's relationship with MARC.

But really, I'm here today not as a town official but in my capacity as a citizen of this state and a resident of the Town of Manchester.

I am here today in strong, unconditional support of Senate Bill 498. There are some folks here today who will speak after me, who can tell you more eloquently than I can about MARC's demonstrated need for this new facility.

That is the bricks-and-mortar perspective. My perspective is that of someone who sees this as an investment in human capital, an investment in the betterment of the human condition, which should be the ultimate goal of this or any government.

Every citizen of this state needs to feel comfort and joy in their lives. And citizens with disabilities must ultimately rely on us to help them reach that place.

It is a moral responsibility, which, sadly, for generations, we neglected to fulfill. MARC has been a part of changing that.

MARC has worked in the Town of Manchester for over 56 years to help mentally disabled individuals create a meaningful life.

MARC creates a happy and safe environment for these citizens, gives them a chance to socialize, share time, laughter, and be creative and productive with others.

It gives them a sense of worth and dignity that is truly priceless. That's what MARC has done for the disabled. Now let me explain what MARC has done for those of us who are not disabled.

Over the past 50 years, MARC has been at the forefront of the effort to move the mentally disabled out of the shadows and, in the process, to move all of us towards a better and brighter future.

The good people of MARC have done much to remove the stigma attached to cognitive, intellectual, and developmental disabilities simply by remaining true to their motto of seeing people, not disabilities.

Because of MARC, I have learned, as have thousands of other people in my town, that the developmentally disabled people have dreams, hopes, fears, and passions that are not unlike my own. I am a better person for it, and my community is better too.

SEN. HANDLEY: Can you summarize your eloquent statement?

DAVID SHERIDAN: I sure can. In closing, I'm grateful for the work that this Committee does to protect, preserve, and enhance the public health of the people of this state.

And I fully appreciate that there are many needs, and the resources are scarce. But I urge the Committee to make this a priority and support and sustain the continued good work of MARC by acting favorably on Raised Senate Bill 498.

And thank you for allowing me to testify, and thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to trespass on your time.

SEN. HANDLEY: It's all right. I'm pretty strict, but I'm, are there any questions, any questions? Thank you very much. Next speaker is Ken Charpentier. Good afternoon, Ken.

KEN CHARPENTIER: Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Co-Chair, Representative Sayers, Senator Handley, Members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Ken Charpentier. I'm the Executive Director of MARC, Inc. of Manchester, and I'm here today to speak in favor of Senate Bill 498, AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR A FACILITY IN MANCHESTER FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, and ask for your support.

MARC, Inc. currently provides support to over 250 individuals with developmental disabilities, and their families, across a broad spectrum of services.

Our employment services include job training, child development, transportation, on-the-job assistance, and follow-up supports to both the employer and the employee.

More than 200 people served by our employment department are currently working in 23 different towns throughout the region.

Our residential department provides support to 48 people living throughout Manchester. Supports are based on individual needs and interests and include transportation, shopping, budgeting, school development, and recreation.

Hours of support are based on individual needs and can vary from as few as 6 hours per week to 24 hours per day. Our retirement service currently supports 25 people.

Retirees choose from a constantly revolving menu of activities developed around their interests.

Activities include the First Chapter of the Red Hat Society, formed by people with disabilities in the nation, and the MARC Visiting Angels, a group of seniors who visit local nursing homes to bring good cheer and companionship.

Our respite service offers a variety of social and recreational activities to people with disabilities who live with parents or other family members.

This service offers people a chance to connect with old and new friends while providing families with a much-needed break from the demands of 24-hour care.

Our self-advocacy committee participates in a wide range of activities designed to foster awareness and encourage positive change.

Many of our members are on local, state, and national boards, working hard to ensure that disability does not limit the achievement of personal dreams.

For the past eight years, we've provided diversity training to every fourth-grade student in the Manchester Public School System and to many private schools.

This training encourages kids to dispel stereotypes and fears and to recognize that all people deserve to be accepted and welcomed as equally important members of our community.

On May 16th, we celebrated 56 years of service to our community. Our society has come a long way during the past 56 years in recognizing the inherent rights of all people to lead active, productive lives in the community, based on individual choice.

The walls have come down for people with developmental disabilities. Many barriers to full participation in community life have been removed.

No longer are people relegated to lives of seclusion, based on a happenstance of birth. The design and construction of a new facility for MARC, Inc. is an exciting time for us.

I'll just skip to one of the primary reasons we need the larger facility, and that has to do with an increasing percentage of people that we serve that are approaching retirement age.

As with the U.S. population in general, many of the people we have served for decades are now experiencing challenges associated with age.

Our new facility will include a senior center that is approximately twice the size of our current location and will be furnished with state-of-the-art adaptive equipment and rehabilitative equipment.

At MARC, Inc., we do what we do, and we can imagine a day when people with disabilities are recognized universally as valued members and equal partners of our society.

And every individual and every citizen, I believe, deserves no less. Your support for Senate Bill 498 will help us achieve this mission, and thank you for providing the opportunity to speak here today.

SEN. HANDLEY: Thank you, Ken, very much. Are there comments or, I think it's just amazing because I see Nate Agostinelli over there, and he and I remember, I'm sure, when the Prignano's and others began this process, a very, very long time ago.

And to think that now, you even have to plan for a retirement, you know, a senior center and retirement center for folks, it's just wonderful, and I thank you very much for all that's been going on. Our next speaker is Thomas McCann. Good afternoon.

THOMAS McCANN: Good afternoon. It's been so many times I've been here, and I think this is my tenth time already.

Good afternoon, my name is Thomas McCann, and I am a self-advocate. I'm here to tell you about MARC, needs a new building. And you should support raising Senate Bill 498.

I live on my own in a condo Manchester, Connecticut. I live independently. I have no roommates, except my cat, Ginger. I can live and work independently because I have support from MARC.

Without MARC, I wouldn't have a job and be able to pay my bills, living in a condo, go to movies, or out to dinner, all the things that you, as legislators, can do to have a full and happy life.

If I couldn't get help for these things, my life would be down the drain. MARC supports people in the community, jobs, and makes sure that we can live independently.

If we did not receive these supports, we would be lost. MARC is asking help from legislators to fund a new building. They need more space to help people.

MARC supports people with disabilities in Manchester and surrounding towns. I want to stress how important this bill is. I know lots of people in Manchester and around the region who need the support provided by MARC.

With a new building, more people could be served, and more types of service could be offered. Support Senate Bill 498.

Make sure that I, and other people like me, get the help I need to keep my job, my home, and my ability to run my own life. Thank you.

SEN. HANDLEY: Thank you very much. Are there questions? Where's your condo, Thomas?

THOMAS McCANN: In Manchester.

SEN. HANDLEY: Oh, okay, all right. I wondered if it was near my house.

THOMAS McCANN: Well--

SEN. HANDLEY: You're not going to tell me.

THOMAS MCCAIN: If you live in Manchester, yes, but if you don't, then, no.

SEN. HANDLEY: All right, okay. Thank you very much. Is Laurie here? Good afternoon.

CAROL BRESLIN: Good afternoon. Madam Chair and Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Carol Breslin. I'm the Quality Assurance Director for MARC, Inc. of Manchester.

And I'm here today on behalf of Laurie Prytko, who is ill and was unable to attend. So I'd like to read her testimony.

Madam Chair and Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Laurie Prytko. I was the Executive Director of MARC, Inc. of Manchester from 1980 to 2006 and currently

serve as a member of the MARC Board of Directors and Co-Chair of the MARC Building Committee.

I'm here today to ask for your support of Senate Bill 498, AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR A FACILITY IN MANCHESTER FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

I have been involved with MARC since the day it was formed in 1952. My sister, Patti, who's no longer [Gap in testimony. Changing from Tape 3B to Tape 4A.]

--MARC. My parents and I also found peace and comfort, knowing that an organization existed to provide the numerous services Patti would need, to give her an opportunity to live as independently as possible.

We are forever in debt to MARC and their many wonderful staff over the years. As MARC matured, so did I. As a teenager, it was a joy and pleasure to have Patti in my life.

She loved the world and taught me compassion, kindness, and understanding towards all people. As a young adult, I was involved with MARC more than ever.

The agency was growing by leaps and bounds as more individuals received services. I saw firsthand happy faces of individuals and their families as they experienced a sense of freedom offered by MARC's many services.

I was so inspired by MARC that I left my job at Pratt & Whitney and became the Executive Director at the agency in 1980.

During this time, I focused on breaking down barriers that existed between people with developmental disabilities and the community.

We began to provide community-based employment opportunities by opening a bakery. We expanded the bakery to a second location, and the community welcomed us with open arms.

People began to notice the talents and skills of the new workforce, people with developmental disabilities. And businesses began calling us to fill their employment needs.

In the early 1990s, the Connecticut General Assembly called upon us to apply our nationally recognized job coach model to Welfare to Work Services in the state.

MARC then expanded to provide retirement, residential, and self-advocacy services to individuals.

People now had the opportunity to live, work, and enjoy their communities according to their individual choices.

REP. SAYERS: Will you, we have a copy of Laurie's statement, so I think if you want to just read maybe the last few words.

CAROL BRESLIN: I think the most important point that Laurie would have wanted to make is that over the years, MARC has had to move many, many times in conjunction with the Town of Manchester's support, to the point that she characterized it as being Manchester's orphan.

So we're asking that you support Senate Bill 498 to find a home for MARC that will be permanent and will allow us to provide the services into the future.

SEN. HANDLEY: I know that that is a great concern, to have, for the first time, a real home. Thank you. Our next speaker is Nathan Agostinelli.

NATHAN AGOSTINELLI: I yield first to our Distinguished State Representative [inaudible - microphone not on]

SEN. HANDLEY: No, I have to yield to the Mayor, so Nate is our former Mayor. I had a slightly different plan for Ryan.

NATHAN AGOSTINELLI: Thank you very much. Representative Sayers, Senator Handley, and Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee, it's really a privilege and an honor to be here to speak on behalf of MARC.

I'm a member of the Board of Directors of MARC, and I'm Co-Chair person of the Building Committee with Laurie Prytko, one of the founders of this great organization.

And the move that MARC is making is very necessary and will help an awful lot of people. I have a statement here. I'm not about to read the statement.

I'll just make a few comments, that MARC is blessed with a fantastic staff. The people that we have, Ken, Kevin, and the rest of them, are just the very finest that I've ever met

And they work hand in hand with the members of MARC, helping. There's nothing greater that we can do for anyone than helping people that are a little less fortunate than ourselves.

You know, someone comes up with different terms every once in a while, and few years ago, somebody came up with the term no-brainer.

I honestly believe that, I know that many of the decisions you have to make are very difficult. But I would consider this, in my mind, a no-brainer. It's something that's necessary.

Not only do we serve Manchester, but we serve the Greater Manchester area. So we have a wide circle of people that we help.

So I would ask you to please consider this bill and pass it. And I'd like to thank you for your indulgence and kindness and listening to us today. Thank you very much. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

SEN. HANDLEY: Fine. Thank you, Nate. Are there any questions? Okay. Thank you. Our next speaker is Mary O'Connor.

And then the two people from the official list, Representative Barry and Frank, can come up. That will work. Good afternoon.

MARY O'CONNOR: Good afternoon. My name is Mary O'Connor. Thank you for this opportunity on behalf of MARC. I am the mother of a developmentally challenged son, and his name is Neil.

In Neil's senior year at East Hartford High, 2001, together with the school staff, our family decided to transition Neil to MARC, Inc., to help shape his future.

To state it simply, it was indeed the very best decision we could have made. And the reason I say this now is because

Neil is gainfully employed at Bob's Discount Furniture Store in Manchester, and he loves his job.

For the past three years, Neil has been sharing a two-bedroom apartment with 24-hour supportive living services. He is living independently of his family, and he's doing fine.

Our hopes and dreams for Neil could not have been realized were it not for the professional guidance and attention provided from MARC, Inc. for Neil's personal and medical needs.

Neil is an insulin-dependent diabetic, and he's got Celiac Disease, wheat and gluten allergies. MARC, Inc. sees that medical personnel are on hand daily to dispense his medications.

Neil's health needs are well taken care of, thanks to MARC. I have become acquainted with MARC almost six years ago.

Walking into that building then and seeing the professionalism and caring attitude of the personnel was heartwarming for me. I had a feeling that Neil would be in very good hands.

During the past six years, I have visited MARC almost on a weekly basis. I have seen the enormous growth of the number of developmentally disabled needing the services of MARC.

The office space, the senior center, the work areas, to put it mildly, are popping at the seams.

Another problem, once I could drive into the parking lot and find a spot. It's almost impossible to find a parking spot now. I drive around and wait for somebody to leave or double park.

Finally, I invite anyone, or all of you, to walk into MARC and see for yourselves the incredible work that's being done in such a cramped facility.

You would see for yourself the dire need for the construction of a new facility. Please, you must pass this bill. Thank you for your kind attention.

SEN. HANDLEY: Thank you very much. Ryan Barry is next, followed by Frank Sykes, who's talking about an earlier bill, I think, Frank, right?

REP. BARRY: Thank you very much, Representative Sayers and Senator Handley. My name is Ryan Barry. I represent the 12th Assembly District in Manchester.

I'm here to testify to register my support in favor of Raised Senate Bill 498. And people who have gone before me have much greater experience and background to speak from.

I have a personal background to speak from in supporting this bill. The purpose for this bill is obviously to construct a building to better help them serve the clients of MARC, Inc.

The building will, if it comes to fruition, will be in my district, so I have a big reason to be here today. And I'm 100%, wholeheartedly in support of this bill.

They serve a lot of seniors, and, as someone mentioned before, they need a larger senior center.

My mother was at McDonald's this morning and saw a number of people at McDonald's, wearing shirts but saying they were going to be turning red later today.

She asked me about it, and I said I was coming here to testify. And my mother and I had talked about a book called A Day at the Beach, by Jean McElraevy, who is a Manchester resident, who is an 85-year-old woman in town, who was instrumental.

She had two children born with developmental disabilities in the early '50s. She was instrumental in putting together MARC, Inc. in '53.

And when she first went to the hospital when her first child was born with a disability, the doctor looked at her and said, does your husband drink? Did you drop the baby on the floor?

He pointed his finger to his head and twirled his finger without saying a word. We've come a long way in 50 years. Obviously, all humans should be accorded the same level of dignity.

And in town, with respect to this particular part of our population, that wouldn't have come about without MARC, Inc. being around.

And they wouldn't be able to have jobs, go out and entertain, go out to the movies, go out to dinner with friends, couldn't have the independence that we all take for granted. MARC, Inc. takes care of this.

And back in 1957, I remember my father telling me that Governor Ribicoff came into Manchester to meet with this woman, the same woman, up the street from my house.

And he told her she would be speaking at the 1957 Conference of the Connecticut Council for Retarded Children, and so she was a major player in talking to the entire State of Connecticut, and our government, about how we should go ahead and treat people with disabilities and provide the best services possible to them.

And so I find it interesting that, at that time, my father was in the House of Representatives, 50 years ago, and I love continuity, and I'm glad that I'm here today to support a bill that is in that same spirit. So thank you very much for having me here to testify today.