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Budget Cuts Pose a Threat to Families Helping Families Centers

Families Helping Families (FHF) Centers have received the financial support of the DD Council since 1992. Each year every dollar of state general funds allocated to the Council is provided to nine of the FHF Centers for their on-going support of individuals with disabilities and their families. (All other Council initiatives and operations are federally funded.) Unfortunately, ongoing cuts to the DD Council in the state budget have left FHF Centers with significantly less resources to meet the needs of the individuals they serve. The current version of the Fiscal Year 2014 budget, now making its way through the legislative process, includes an additional \$55,000 cut. If not restored, this will result in a cumulative reduction of over 34% or \$170,000 collectively to the nine Centers since 2010.

FHF Centers were established as a result of Act 378 (and the resulting Community and Family Support System Plan) to provide information and referral, education and training, and peer-to-peer support to individuals with disabilities and their family members. FHF Centers serve as a “one-stop shop” in the community to guide individuals in navigating the complex disability service delivery system. Over 44,000 individuals contacted FHF Centers for help in 2012 alone. FHF Centers hosted over 452 training sessions, attended by over 22,000 individuals, made over 7,000 referrals for resources and/or services, and provided over 27,000 units of peer-to-peer support. FHF Centers are staffed by parents of children with disabilities, family members, or individuals with disabilities, and share experience and information from the perspective of someone “who has been there.”

Budget cuts have resulted in reductions to the number of staff and opportunities for providing services to individuals and families at many of the FHF Centers. Additional cuts could jeopardize some Centers’ ability to keep open their doors. The assistance provided through FHF Centers are not replicated by any other organization in the state, leaving families nowhere to turn, particularly while waiting years for services.

LaCAN members and other advocates are talking to legislators about the value of the FHF Centers and are advocating to restore \$55,000 to this year’s DD Council budget to keep the FHF component of the Community and Family Support System available to individuals with disabilities and their families. Fifty-five thousand dollars may not seem like much money in the enormous state budget, but to the families who depend on FHF as a lifeline of information and support, the impact is huge.

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