



Sharing Your Story ***Regional Center Employees***

The Lanterman Coalition, made up of the 21 major stakeholders in California’s community-based developmental service system, is uniting around a single critical concern. Years of underfunding, cuts, rate freezes, old funding formulas, and inflation have hurt service providers and regional centers’ ability to ensure people with developmental disabilities and their families get the services and supports they need. To fix this, our system needs a 10% across-the-board funding increase now, and 5% increases yearly, until funding for provider rates and regional center services is reformed. As you meet with Legislators, send letters, and spread the word, figuring out what to say can sometimes be the hardest part. Here are a few tips that might help!

The Basic Format

Sharing your story, whether in a letter, at a hearing, or in a one-on-one meeting, starts the same. Thank the Legislator for their time! Then tell a bit about the issue, and give a few examples from your own life. End your letter, public testimony, or meeting by urging the Legislator(s) to remember you when they are voting on developmental services issues, and thank them again.

Talking Points

What you bring to this conversation is important, and it’s critical that you share your expertise! In these messages, draw from your experiences and share the truth you live every day. When looking at these possible talking points, be sure to use your own words, and your answers touch on our universally-shared theme: *Funding reform will help our system better serve people with developmental disabilities.*

- *Regional centers cannot afford to employ the number of staff necessary to meet individuals’ needs.*

You know how true this is. Increased caseloads combined with more requirements of the job make it harder to do your job effectively at the regional center today. What specific example of this comes to mind?

- *Turnover makes service coordination more difficult.*

The way the budget is set up makes it hard for regional centers to retain dedicated employees. So when an employee leaves the regional center, a new staff person comes in, and has to learn all of the duties of a complex job in addition to familiarizing themselves with the needs of each individual on their huge caseloads. Have you seen clients impacted by regional center staff turnover?

- *Services have become more difficult to sustain.*

It is difficult to recruit new service providers in light of the increased mandates without rates to support these changes. Many existing providers are closing their doors or cutting back services because they can no longer afford to stay in business. Are there any times you have known exactly what the right service or support is, but couldn't find it available?

- *Services are more difficult to coordinate.*

People are hurt by the lack of necessary services. As the numbers of providers and types of services decreases, choice for the individual decreases as well. There are some individuals waiting a lengthy period of time to access the specific services their planning teams agree they need.

- *Development of new and innovative services for changing populations has fallen behind.*

The population served by regional centers is shifting, such as the increase in individuals with autism and those with aging parents. Many of these groups require specialized services to meet their unique needs. What new service models do you see that are needed now and for the future for changing populations that aren't currently available? Have you attempted to develop resources without success and why?

- *California needs federal funding but doesn't keep its commitments to the federal government.*

California gets about \$2 billion in federal funding each year to help pay for its developmental services system. In order to get that money, the state has to meet certain caseload ratios and have enough services to meet people's needs. In 1997 the federal government found problems in these areas and said the state wasn't doing enough to protect the health and safety of individuals. This cost the state \$933 million in lost federal funds. Right now, not a single regional center is meeting all of its mandated caseload ratios. What would your regional center be able to do differently for your clients if there were lower caseloads and more resources?

Your advocacy matters! Our system is facing a monumental challenge. It's big, it's complicated, and there are a lot of moving parts. But we have to start somewhere, and a 10% budget increase for our system is the first step the Lanterman Coalition is rallying around. To make that – and comprehensive reform – happen, we need you to stand up for people with developmental disabilities, their families, service providers, and regional centers. The system that supports people to live in communities of their choosing needs you. Every voice throws light on a part of this common problem we are facing, and we need you to let your light shine!

P.S. Please let us know how it went! While this is a grassroots push, any feedback you have will help us all better focus our work. Have any questions? Get a Legislator to sign [this letter of support](#) for Senator Beall's [Budget request](#)? Learn that they have a family member with a developmental disability? Told directly that this isn't their priority? Sharing the intel will let us ensure that everyone – including you – can make best use of their time and talents! Please go to www.lantermancoalition.org/contact and drop us a line, or email info@lantermancoalition.org!

Links

Senator Beall's Budget Request – www.arcenet.org/docs/Local-Advocacy-Beall-Request.pdf

Support Letter – www.arcenet.org/docs/Local-Advocacy-Beall-Support-Letter.pdf