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Bill 7280

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Stacy Hultgren, and I am a resident of Shelton. My 21 year old son Andrew lives with me. He has autism and is severely disabled, but he does not have mental retardation. The program he has funded by the school district will end in June. At that time, he will very likely lose his part time job. He will lose the momentum he has gained in learning independence skills. He will lose his self confidence and self respect. He will very likely remain living with me for the rest of my life. What he will do after that, I do not know.

I am a single mother working full time to support myself and my three children. I cannot afford to privately hire someone to help Andrew. I also cannot afford to spend the time it takes to help him learn all the hundreds of things he still needs to learn. Nor does he, like any other young adult, want to learn these things from his mother.

Andrew would be an excellent employee. He is bright, learns routines easily, would be on time every day, try his very best, and follow all the rules - at least the ones he understands. He would also be likely to inadvertently offend customers or make serious

errors in judgment without someone there to guide him. He would be a wonderful tenant – he does not have wild parties, and would not bounce his rent checks. It is also possible that he could injure himself through his own lack of safety awareness without someone to monitor his living arrangements. He would be a wonderful friend and companion; but without someone to arrange for leisure activities and help him manage the social demands, he will sit at home watching Jeopardy. What a waste of an exceptional human being, and all it would take is someone to act as a mentor and monitor, and as a social coach.

We cannot afford to waste such human resources because we are short-sighted. Too many worthy individuals do not have a way of showing the world their potential, and are languishing at home. Many individuals with autism spectrum disorders only need minimal supports – minimal in terms of resources, but not in terms of value. They do not want to remain dependent on people to give them things – they are waiting for someone to ‘teach them to fish’. We need to step up and teach them; we cannot wait any longer.

Thank you.

Stacy Hultgren