

February 18, 2010

Senator Toni Harp and Representative John Geragosian
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Re: DDS 90% attendance-based reimbursement

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Emily Maker and I live in Vernon, CT. My son, Matthew Kwolek, is a 30 year old quiet, friendly guy who happens to have a developmental disability with Autistic tendencies. He also has a seizure disorder, environmental and food allergies. He is unable to make proper decisions for himself and needs some assistance with daily living skills; however, he is encouraged to help with small jobs around the group home, which he readily does.

Matthew has been a recipient of HARC, Inc. services since his early teens, beginning first with recreation. Now the services have grown to include being a resident in one of their group homes in Bloomfield and the day program at HARC, Inc. Currently he also works one day a week at a Hartford law firm with three other consumers and a supportive, conscious, and caring job coach.

I am questioning the rationale of the 90% attendance record that DDS wants to impose on consumers who are served by private providers. I understand the economic problems that face us all; however, private providers have been getting by with stretched budgets for 20 years. They have dealt with cuts in funding and no COLA for the past several years, all while providing excellent, cost effective programs. The additional financial burden of the 90% attendance record will only ultimately end in hurting the consumers that they serve; the most fragile population of our society, who have a variety of developmental, behavioral, physical, medical and emotional issues that have to be dealt with each day. To suggest that they go to their day program regardless of their condition on any given day, or else the funding will be cut, is senseless and heartless. The health and safety of all will be at stake. This is one reason why HARC, Inc. and other private providers are so successful. Their staff takes the time to create an atmosphere where most, if not all, needs are met so the consumers can experience success at their individual levels. This is difficult work. If funding is cut, so will staff positions; the programs will suffer, and most importantly, so will the consumers. What is most offensive is hearing that the state providers do not have to adhere to this 90% attendance record. This is simply unacceptable and unjust.

Very briefly, if staff had been short at HARC, Inc. recently, my son Matthew would not be doing as well as he is now at work. He would be sitting alone at the back of the room unproductive. For example, he can have anxieties over changes in his environment, people, too much activity or the behavior of others. While Matthew is verbal, he has

processing problems that make it difficult to express his feelings, so he will withdraw or refuse to go to work. On some occasions recently, he did go to work but refused to enter the employment center. A few days he had to be taken back home. The staff worked long and hard with him offering options to try, even calling the family in to discuss what approach to take. They discovered one of the reasons for the anxiety was another consumer who would quietly bother him; another was that a favorite person had moved on. Now had the staff not been as compassionate, caring, alert, and dedicated to their job, he would still be just sitting there. The needs of the other consumer were addressed as well. Stability and consistency along with kindness are most the important aspects of the day program, and HARC, Inc. provides this. Cutting operating funds will not.

I ask the committee on behalf of Matthew and all the others to please take a long hard look at the reasons behind this 90% attendance record. I agree it's important to have consumers at their day programs for success, but you have to consider all the needs of this population. Sometimes they absolutely have to stay away from their respective day programs for one valid reason or another.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this vital issue; it is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,



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