

My name is Joan Volpe and I work for Ability Beyond Disability a non-profit organization serving many people with disabilities. Over the past 23 years, providers have received COLA's averaging 1.19%. During this period the vast majority of services have been entrusted to private providers. With actual CPI indices over the same period increasing between 4.15 and 8.6%, it is hard to conclude that Connecticut has much of a commitment to people with developmental disabilities.

Our families are frightened and angry. Frightened for the future and angry that the State doesn't provide sufficient funding for their kids while much more money is made available to people served in the public sector.

Six years ago, Ability Beyond Disability closed its sheltered workshop, totally integrating 200 consumers throughout western CT in jobs and activities of their choosing. The transition was highly praised by DDS and throughout the country. Today, as part of a cost saving measure DDS is implementing a 90% attendance requirement on our consumers, many of whom have mobility issues, behavioral challenges or are older and frail. We had thought that legislative intervention a few months ago had convinced DDS to at least delay this plan subject to legislative review but apparently not. The 90% attendance is arbitrary and virtually unachievable as a practical matter and will reduce our funding by at least \$250,000 and perhaps as much as \$500,000. So much for consumers' choice to be a part of their community!

Choice is a big "catch-word" in DDS publications. But in operation, the tool that is often used is called "LON", Level of Need, often completed by a DDS case manager with limited direct contact with the consumer. Under current consideration is a plan to convert the funding of residents of group homes to individualized reimbursement based on the "Level of Need" tool. We haven't yet heard the DDS vision on how the conversion will work when an underlying premise of group living is shared staffing...just as we haven't heard how we might be expected to continue to support our consumers in jobs and other community settings they have chosen, when our day program funding is reduced by 15 to 30%.

The dual system of programs operated in both the public and private sectors is not only highly inefficient and unfair from a consumer funding perspective; there are quality disparities as well. For example, Ability Beyond Disability has expressed interest in assuming operation of a home currently operated by DDS as part of the group home privatization process currently underway. The property we looked at is in extremely poor condition and there is no funding to upgrade it. We have real concerns about undertaking a program in which we couldn't be proud of, to say nothing of the fact that we doubt it could pass licensure standards. I might also note here that the results of licensure inspections in privately operated homes are published on DDS's website...not so of the inspections of State operated homes.

Over the past years, there has been a promulgation of regulations and processes, all of course required but not funded. What has been lacking is a vision. Plans that address evolving needs, set goals and track outcomes.

Fundamental change is needed in Connecticut's service delivery system. We need to work together in true partnership with a shared vision and commitment to those we serve.