

#19 2C

For Appropriations Committee Meeting
2/19/10

My name is Renee Walkley and I am the Coordinator of Life Enrichment at HARC. I have worked with individuals with intellectual disabilities for almost 15 years, over 8 of those at HARC.

As the Coordinator of Life Enrichment I primarily support our elderly population. I worry how this change to attendance based funding will affect my participants. Many of them have chronic health conditions and aren't able to attend at 90%. In addition, my participants are more susceptible to illnesses which often take longer to resolve due to their advanced age and other diagnoses. As a result, their attendance is dependant on their own individual health concerns. These occurrences are unpredictable, therefore it is required that we have an appropriate staff to client ratio every day to ensure the health and safety of everyone. Every participant should have the opportunity to attend as often as they are able and not be penalized for health or behavioral issues preventing them from doing so.

My participants look forward to coming to our program each day. It provides socialization opportunities to them so that are important to all of us as humans. What if that wasn't available because of health problems due to a diagnosis or illness? I have a participant who has been absent from the program due to a medical issue for several weeks. He has called an average of three times a week to check in and see what's going on with us and his friends. I have another participant who cries all day if she is not able to come in to the program. That tells you something about how important day programs are to our participants. They have friendships here and are part of an extended family. Typically, when participants are absent it is not because they do not feel like attending. It is due to a medical or behavioral issue, or something beyond their control.

We are already underfunded but are 'making due' with what we have because we are here for our participants. I worry that a further decrease in funding will prevent us from providing day programs so important to their health and well-being.

These are PEOPLE we are supporting and this change is inevitably going to hurt them. We all have a responsibility in preventing that from happening. Please remember that. Thank You.