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PREPARED TESTIMONY FOR THE APPROPRIATION COMMITTEE TO BE  
DELIVERED ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2011.

Members of the Appropriation Committee: My name is Michael Donovan, 28 Quaker Ridge Rd, Bethel. Again I come before you as a member of the Family Empowerment Task Force, a group of concerned parents and family members advocating for our loved ones. More specifically, I am here to better ensure my son's future well-being. Stephen is a 37 year old severely retarded Downs Syndrome man. He receives community based services from Ability Beyond Disability. He is safe, happy, and secure. He has a home, a job, and participates in many community activities. He has been with Ability for just over ten years. My wife Maureen and I visit his group home on Sweetcake Mountain Road in New Fairfield every Thursday afternoon. We spend time with him, talk to staff about any concerns we may have, and pick up his dirty laundry in exchange for the clothing my wife washes and irons. He is the best dressed guy in the house! Every other weekend, he comes home for a sleepover which he really enjoys. The next day soon after having breakfast, he is ready to return to his group home—which is a testament to the care he receives there.

My wife and I are intensely interested in doing all that we can to help Ability Beyond Disability stay solvent. We belong to the Family Advisory Board to get a feel for the problems and concerns within the organization. We have formed a Family Giving Circle—one of many in the organization—to help raise money for Ability. We have named our circle: Stephen's Circle of Love. We have received pledges from over 25 family, friends, and neighbors totaling over \$2500.00

While this sounds good, my fear is that it is not nearly enough. Over the years, the private, non-profit provider's level of funding has decreased while, at the same time, the cost of providing services has increased. Governor Malloy claims that everyone has to "share to pain" in order to close the budget gap. I don't have any definitive figures, but my understanding is that many community providers have either closed shop, or have drastically cut services. At Ability Beyond Disability, we see the constant turnover in staffing. Staff leaves because they can earn much more income elsewhere. We know that some staff has one or two jobs in order to survive. My question is: Haven't the community providers been in "pain" long enough. I ask you to please vote to increase the funding for DDS to better support day services, residential services, and home and community based employment opportunities. Stop trying to solve the state's budget gap on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens.