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I am here today to address concerns about the funding for DDS - Group Homes - Day Programs and Employment Opportunities.

My son, Andy has cerebral palsy, cortical blindness and seizures. The cerebral palsy has not affected his ability to walk or talk but his ability to write, tie his shoes, button his coat, shave, or take care of his personal hygiene. Cortical blindness does not allow him to always see where he is going or if there is a step or object in his way so when in the community he walks with a guide and in an unfamiliar surrounding needs verbal direction so that he doesn't walk into furniture or trip over objects in his path. The seizures have left him with numerous staples and scars in his head and missing teeth. All of his disabilities require trained staff to help with daily living i.e. preparing his meals, giving him medication, showering, personal hygiene and safety at home and in the community.

With all these obstacles Andy has to overcome on a daily basis, he gets up every morning with a great attitude and looks forward to going to his day program in Torrington; Andy is also employed by a local Torrington company that makes nut, bolts and fasteners. The items are brought to the day site by a staff member and with very little assistance Andy can do this job quite independently.

Andy has lived in a group home setting for the past 25 years and I am very concerned that if the funding is not provided his level of care will not be sustained. It has been over 20 years since the community providers have had a cost of living raise. Oak Hill has already closed four day programs. The closing of these day programs has caused overcrowding and confusion for these individuals. Where are disabled individuals going to go if there are no programs available? Parents have to work and need help with care for their disabled children during the day. Day programs provide a safe caring environment giving parents peace of mind whether they are working parents or elderly parents.

I am here today to ask you to keep the funds for these programs in place in order to provide SAFE programs with QUALITY OF CARE by paying competitive wages for CONTINUITY OF STAFF and to have the State of Connecticut set HIGH STANDARDS so that all handicapped individuals have the equal rights they deserve.

I have worked very hard to get my son the best education, group home and day program to give him the best quality of life. Thanks to the hard work and dedication by the management and staff of Oak Hill Andy's life is better than I could have ever imagined. Please help keep it that way.

Lois M. Nitch

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