

Tuesday, March 1, 2011

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Committee on Human Services

Proposed Bill No. 5893

An Act Concerning Home and Community Based Services for Persons with Acquired Brain Injury.

Good morning chairs and committee members.

My name is Melinda Montovani and I am a resident of West Hartford. I have the privilege of working at the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut (BIAC) where we serve the entire state of CT.

I support Bill No 5893, An Act concerning Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) for persons with acquired brain injury (ABI).

I am in favor that the individuals on the Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Waiver wait list be given the same access to services as those people accessing the ABI waiver through the Money Follows the Person (MFP) demonstration project. Those who enter the system through MFP, have a waiver slot created for them. They do not go on a wait list. Those who are living in the community may wait years to obtain home and community based services unless, they choose to re-institutionalize themselves. Then they can get services in a few months.

To be eligible for the waiver someone must be in an institution, or Department of Social Services (DSS) must determine that they are at risk for institutionalization without waiver services. So everyone that is currently living in the community on the wait list is 'at risk'. In response to a family member's disbelief, it is simply confirmed, "Yes, your love one definitely needs services to live safely, but you will not have access to those services for a few years."

There is at times a misunderstanding of how well people living in the community on the wait list are functioning. The thought is, if these individuals are functioning without services, then why we should pay for them to get on the waiver. I recently had a call from a mother who lives out of state. Her daughter lives alone in public housing for people with disabilities. She is frantic and can't understand why her 40 year old daughter, Sue, cannot get any services. She has been told by the Department of Social Services (DSS) that there is no additional funding and her daughter will get services when her name comes up on the wait list.

In the course of a week, Sue, had 3 falls. Twice she called 911 as she couldn't get back up. Her 3rd fall, the phone was not within reach, she could not problem solve how to get help and lay on the ground for 24 hours until found by a neighbor.

This is a woman who tries everything in her reach to be independent and remain in her home. Due to the cognitive issues resulting from her brain injury, she cannot drive. With assistance she signed up for Para transit services. Eventually, it was requested of her that she no longer make reservations as she would forget someone was coming to pick her up. She needed Para transit because of her disability and yet was asked to leave Para transit because of her disability.

This past week I received another call from this mother. Sue was found in her apartment soaked in urine and unable to get up. 911 was called and she was brought to the hospital. Transition planning was discussed. It became evident that going home meant returning to the same unsafe situation because Sue would still not have access to services. However, if she chose the route of institutionalization, she may be eligible for the MFP demonstration program. After a 3 month stay, it was possible she would be able to return to the community with the services she needs. Sue is now in a nursing home. Please do not believe the lie, that just because people are living in the community without services, that they are fine. Had this issue with the ABI Waiver wait list been addressed previously, Sue would be living in her home safely and independently which is where she would like to be.

Fortunately for those individuals with a brain injury already residing in an institution, they will be able to access services in a number of months. Through the Money Follows the Person Demonstration Project, people can access the ABI Waiver services after residing in the institution for 3 months. A slot is created and there is no wait list. They will not be transitioned into the community without services in place. We are asking that everyone is given this same timely access to services. By supporting Bill 5893, you can create a system that works for all individuals impacted by brain injury.

Money Follows the person has inadvertently created a system where there is an incentive to go to an institution. If Bill 5893 does not pass, and the wait list continues to not move, individuals will be forced to choose between living at risk in the community for years while they wait for services, or return to a nursing home, where after 3 months they can access services. MFP recently was funded to transition 5200 people out of institutions over the next 5 years. But it also created incentive to go into a nursing home. Addressing the wait list issue will remove the need for people to have to go to nursing homes to obtain home and community based services in a timely fashion. People like Sue will be able to remain in their homes.

In his budget address, Governor Malloy stated, "I believe deeply that public service is an honor and a privilege. But we are not here just to serve. We are here because we have a moral obligation to make this state a better place for our having lived and served in it."

You have the opportunity to make this state a better place right now, by supporting and passing Bill 5893.

Thank you.