

My name is Jill Cohen and I am a parent of an Adult son who has Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. I am one of the lucky parents whose child was able to be placed in a Group Home. Seventeen years ago I was faced with an awful realization that I could not meet my child's needs and that I needed help. My son's DDS Case Manager at that time took pity on me when she gave me the news that there was a 15 year waiting list for a Group Home placement. Shocked and dismayed, I called my then Governor and pleaded my case. He did not turn his back on me. He understood that my ship was sinking and helped me secure Steven's placement. That being said. What about all the other sons and daughters out there who need a Group home placement? What about all the parents who are aging along with their disabled adult kids, wondering what will become of them when they are no longer around to be their support? They don't have years and years to wait.

So what does all that have to do with HB bills 5142 and 5259?

I anticipate the intent of such bills to be discriminatory and a vehicle to further marginalize persons with Intellectual/Developmental disabilities from full inclusion into the community. It is a basic human right to be able to live and work in any community without discrimination. These bills give voice to those who are fearful of, non-informed about and prejudice towards this population. This is wrong on so many levels. I envision a hearing about a proposed Group Home attracting persons who have unfounded notions, who will not be facing the potential residents of the proposed Group Home, but rather an Agency representative or two. They will never meet the parents or siblings who are struggling and hoping for a decent and safe residence for their loved ones. We are ALL citizens of this state and ALL of us deserve a place in the community. What message are we sending the children of these towns? In a world that fails in many ways to be compassionate, it is important to speak out for equality, justice and respect, including the right to live in a safe, family friendly, tree lined suburban neighborhood with a back yard and garden and place to entertain your family and friends. Or is that only restricted to those persons who are not living in a Group Home? I am sure the headlines will read " Not in my Neighborhood: Not in my Town". The history of contempt for the establishment of Group Homes is well documented in the archives of any regional newspaper. I am here to keep those headlines in a historical context. We can only do this by blocking pathways that manipulate the statues for discriminatory purposes. The need for more Home and Community Based services is growing exponentially in our state. How can this committee justify these bills? I challenge our state legislature to support a culture of compassion for all CT citizens that we can proudly share with other states who are in need of a compassionate model in upholding the rights of all its citizens.

On behalf of my son and all of the persons with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities, their families and friends, I thank you for your sincere consideration.