

Testimony to the Labor & Public Employees Committee

March 13, 2012

Proposed House Bill 5433:

An Act Creating a Procedure for Personal Care Attendants to Collectively Bargain With the State

Chairman and members of the Labor Committee thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Dawn Lazaroff, I am the Administrator for Educational Programs at The Arc of Quinebaug Valley in Danielson, I am on the Board of Directors for The Arc Connecticut, and I am the mother of a 35 year old man with Developmental Disabilities. My husband and I, along with our son, hire the Direct Support Professionals who support him in his apartment and in his job as the Self Advocate Coordinator for The Arc of Quinebaug Valley and The Arc Connecticut. I am here today in strong opposition to Raised Bill #5433.

My husband and I started teaching our son to be a strong advocate in grammar school, now he advocates for others as well. Early on in his adult life the Department of Developmental Disabilities created a program called "Self Determination". This program would allow us as a family to hire, and fire if necessary, our own staff to support our son as he embarked on an independent adult life. This was an answer to our prayers as parents. If we teach our son what to look for in a support person he would be closer to the principals of "Self Determination" and we would be able to check that skill off our list for living a self-determined, independent life when we are not here.

We have had many support staff over the years; one took advantage financially, one verbally abusive, and one made bad decisions that affected our son. We have also hired some wonderful people who truly care for our son. Today his residential staff has been with us for 4 years, she works 9 hours a week. His vocational staff works 13.5 hours a week, he has been with us two years. When we hired our son's staff we were clear that his DDS budget could not afford benefits, vacations, and for one of the staff no mileage is included. None of this mattered to either staff. We have been able to let staff go when necessary and hire when necessary with no problem. My son's staff did not pursue the Union, the Union pursued them.

This is the beginning of chipping away at our son's "Self Determination". The Union Reps who were at our meeting last week made it quite clear to us that this is being done to us because of an agreement with the Governor. Whatever the reason, it doesn't feel good. Others made a decision and never thought about how it was going to affect families and individuals with developmental disabilities and other life affecting disabilities. How could that possibly feel good?

If this is to be a fair and equitable union between all parties then all stakeholders, families, consumers, Self-Advocates, and Advocate agencies, need to be at the table when the discussions take place.

Thank you for your time and consideration.