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To: Members of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees:

Testimony on Raised Bill No. 5433

My name is Mickey Herbst, and I am the father of 37 year old, Jenna Herbst, who needs 24 hour support under the guidelines of the DDS. For the past 10 years, she has been living in her own affordable apartment in Westport, and goes to a day support program offered by Star in Norwalk.

In addition to the day program, her needs have successfully been met by a combination of accessing 14 hours a week of home health aide support, and currently five individuals that we have hired under the Medicaid waiver. Her entire budget is less than the average cost in a group home, and she is living a full life in her community.

Her budget confines the amount we can pay the wonderful people that support her needs. There have been a stable and dedicated group of employees, who work together to make sure the schedule works, and that Jenna's safe and well supervised.

Since Jenna needs 24hour support, and cannot be unsupervised, unless her budget would be increased, funding for any additional expenses associated with the requirements of this legislation would have to be added to her budget.

Further, any restrictions or requirements of the staff may create unintended consequences. For example, one of the principal employees that work with Jenna, has some mild disabilities herself, but is the most important person in Jenna's life. Together, they are a team, and are among the most loved and recognizable people in Westport. Placing certain kinds of hurdles on this employee, could disqualify her from working with Jenna, which would be a tragedy resulting in a disaster for both of them.

The system of individualized budgets funded by DDS as it is currently constructed is working very well for Jenna, and our family. I am fearful that this bill could create problems that would detract from the principals of self determination that makes it work so well as it does.

Respectfully submitted,
Mickey Herbst, Westport