For The Record

Testimony – February 22, 2012
Legislative Program Review & Investigations Committee
In Support of House Bill 5036
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Thank you for the opportunity to share part Andy and my story with you today.

My son, Andy is under the care of a private provider and has been for the pasted 26 years. He is proof that the private provider can and does provide excellent care and has help Andy develop into the person he is today. I would hope that 26 years later it would be easier for parents to get the help they need for their child but instead of the system improving I see it as just as cumbersome as it was 26 years ago. I truly believe it is so important to help your child transition while you are alive and can oversee the programs than to be put in a situation where your child is now 40 years plus and the transition is so much harder on everyone.

Keeping qualified staff to care for individuals with special needs is of the utmost importance. Without qualified staff I would not be able to sleep at night worrying about Andy's wellbeing. In order to keep quality staff the private providers need the funds to pay a salary that will encourage individuals to go into this field. It is not an easy job to care for individuals that need 24 hour care and they are at risk if the staff is not well trained. As costs rise in our own homes so does the cost for a group home or day facility. The funding needs to keep pace with the changes in our economy.

We have made so many strides in the past 26 years to give individuals with intellectual and developmental disability a better quality of life. Sometimes I feel we are going backwards and not forwards with our thinking to offer the care they need and deserve. A group home setting, such as Andy's home, gives him independence, a social life with his peers and the chance to live longer and healthier.

Andy's life is an example of what hard work and persistence can achieve. He is healthier and happier than I could ever imagine. I am deeply concerned that all the time, effort and cost it has taken to give Andy every opportunity possible, would have been in vain, should the current programs become understaffed and over- crowded the quality of care will go down also. People like my son, Andy, are precious and we should not lose sight of what we all want in live respect and quality of care and if we live long enough we too may need the care.

At the present time I am holding workshops for parents of children ages 15 to 21 entitled "After the Cap and Gown". I want to share Andy's success story with them and to encourage them to look to the future so their child will also have a good quality of life but I am very concerned that the funding will not be there. Please continue to support the private providers with the funds that are needed to expand and to move toward the future where other parents can experience the success I have seen with Andy.