

## **Members of the Public Health Committee:**

Testimony of Tracy Atwood

I urge your support to amend Senate Bill 129, which is currently before your committee, with language to reopen the Southbury Training School ("STS") to new admissions. About a year ago I testified and encouraged the committee to consider reopening STS to new admissions.

My brother, David Atwood, who will be 59 in two days, has been at STS since 1960. He has Downs Syndrome and although his mental level is that of a one and a half year old David is thriving at STS. Most of the residents of STS are severely disabled, suffering from intellectual, physical, and medical disabilities. STS offers an array of services that are crucial to the well-being of this population. They include 24/7 on-site medical staff, a health care unit that enables individuals to receive care that would otherwise be available only in a hospital or nursing home, staff psychiatrists who are familiar with the history of each resident, an experienced staff with minimal turnover and a dental clinic.

My siblings and I have considered residential placement for David and visited several homes and agencies. We did not find any arrangement that would provide the quality of life that David has had at Farm 1 and his current home in Cottage #18. We visited several group homes to find a possible placement for David. The one we selected rejected David because he was too active. At STS David has his own room and is part of a 'cottage like' subgroup of 4 -6 men of similar mental level. A campus setting such as STS is a more cost effective way to deliver the host of services required for profoundly and severely retarded persons according to the 2003 CCS full study and the 2009 CCS update.

Yet the State is trying to move residents into community placements and close STS. Why?

Will David have better care at less cost in a group home? Our experience indicates just the opposite.

Due to both a court order, which is no longer in effect, and a bill passed by the Connecticut Legislature without the input of the Atwood family and other STS families and guardians, new admissions to STS have been blocked since 1986. As a result, the fixed costs of operating STS have been spread since the 1980s over a steadily shrinking base of residents, and the cost of care per resident has steadily risen.

STS is a crucial part of Connecticut's system of care for the intellectually and developmentally disabled. My sisters and I encourage you to reopen the doors at STS. This will revitalize the facility and ensure the maintenance of quality care for our brother David, as well as benefit many more people in the surrounding community.

Allowing new admissions to STS would accomplish the following:

- New admissions would result in a lowered cost of care per resident at the facility and help make it financially viable.

- New admissions would shorten or possibly eliminate a growing waiting list for residential care and services for intellectually disabled people throughout the state.

- New admissions would allow STS to continue and possibly expand its role as a resource for dental and medical care for community-based clients of DDS.

Very truly yours,

Tracy Atwood

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