

February 14, 2014

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony_H.B.5052

Tom Schuck

Good Evening, my name is Tom Schuck. I am here tonight in opposition to H.B. No. 5052, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS. With this budget proposal, the Governor has once again recommended elimination of the Services for Persons with Disabilities line item, which includes funding for the Brain Injury Alliance of CT (BIAC) to provide critical services to CT citizens.

My specific brain injury is called Lateral Medulary Syndrome, which for me was caused by dissection of the vertebral artery. What caused the dissection is unknown. The dissection further caused a couple immediate strokes, in which ability to walk, talk and process information clearly was compromised. After 5 years now, I have severe double vision and sudden loss of balance, and still have difficulty processing information. Shaking hands, petting my dog, or having someone gently touch me is extremely painful, and yet I can accidentally cut or burn myself without knowing it until I see it.

At first, I tried to deny my limitations, believing I was still just as smart and strong as ever, but reality and depression set in, and no one knew anything. I was immediately accepted by State Disability, but they had no idea how to refer me for help or counseling, nor did the DSS, nor did the state 211, nor did Easter Seals. Easter Seals did suggest BIAC.

I called BIAC and suddenly a whole world of resources was opened to me. I found about medical professionals, treatments, support groups and other people like me. I was not alone. It was more than information, it was people who were specifically trained for me.

Currently, I am a co-facilitator for BIAC's Manchester support which meets every first Thursday of the month and also attend the Simsbury support group as often as I can. In these support groups typically a group of 10

or more of us meet to discuss subject relevant to what happens to us and around us. Sometimes a new visitor will come that obviously just needs a lot of support from an established group. We talk about treatments, doctors, ABI waivers and loss of critical care, jobs, family and many other subjects. The format for each support group is that there are usually two, an survivor, like myself, and a medical professional from the field the neuro-sciences or neuro therapies. These support groups are critical to survivors, family members and caregivers because only other people who have experienced brain injury, or work with survivors, can truly understand the challenges we face every day.

I did a little a personal research before I came here. The fact is that the CDC reports that 1.7 million Americans will have a brain injury each year, and that brain injuries are involved in for 30.5% of all deaths, and 10 out of 1,000 people in Connecticut will have a stroke by the age 65 and the age of stroke is decreasing. The average age in our support group is way under 60, some of our members being in their 30's or younger.

My little group represents Car accidents, Skiing accidents, cheerleading accidents, work accidents. We were all once very important people, excuse me, we are still very important people. This happens to everyone.

Please restore and increase BIAC's funding, especially since there is an expected surplus of State funds this year.

Thank you for your time.

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