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Old Lyme, CT
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H.B. No. 5030 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015

I speak today for the developmentally disabled and the worried and weary family members caring for them. I am a parent to a twenty-two year old young man who has Down syndrome. Last year no other social service agency suffered the cuts that the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) did and now the governor's proposed adjustments in HB 5030 does nothing to rectify that. It is a moral obligation that the state of Connecticut has to care for this segment of the population, a too often invisible population that is being treated as a hockey puck in the game of politics.

There are currently over 3500 individuals on the combined waiting and planning lists for the Department of Developmental Services. DDS was formerly known as the Department of Mental Retardation and during those years many parents were told that when the time came, they would be there to help, myself included. These same parents are now being told the only hope they have of getting a residential placement is in the event of the parents' death. We have many aging parents and single parents caring for these individuals and this is their greatest concern. I share that concern.

The developmentally disabled, under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), get educated in their home towns and then they go off a cliff at age twenty-one when DDS becomes responsible for them. This is not efficient, but it is the current reality. A transition coordinator was assigned to my son to oversee his transition into the DDS system when my son turned twenty-one. This transition coordinator, a former Birth to Three case manager received no training for this new position. This is another example of how funding cuts have affected this department.

Those with developmental disabilities have varying needs. There is no one size fits all answer for this population. They require an array of services to meet their needs. How many of you have volunteered with Special Olympics or been in a classroom to witness that many that make up this population have abilities as well as their disabilities? Some of you have met with constituents; families that have a family member with a developmental disability. I would be surprised if you look at this population the same as you once did and it is my hope that you will now legislate from this new perspective.

Our children are not numbers and it is important to remember the real cost of the decisions you make here. We need help to transition our children to housing, whether it is creative or a group home long before we die as this transition will be a long one. Very few of us have the resources to place our children in settings where they can thrive or be cared for. As a society we moved away from institutions because of the inhumane conditions. What we face today is also inhumane and it is immoral. I implore you to provide for those that cannot provide for themselves as I speak for those that cannot speak.