

My name is Lisa Weisinger-Roland and I live in West Hartford. Thank you for reading about my family and the impact that DDS cuts have on it. I am the proud mother of 3 children, my oldest, Jamie has Down syndrome. We are asking for your help in maintaining Jamie's quality of life. I am hopeful that most of you were here on February 7th to listen to the testimony of 20 different families. Everyone who testified had the same plea, please give DDS enough funds to help our children. The cuts that DDS has had to endure directly affects the lives of our children and all of us, as family members. The ripple effect of those cuts to DDS are felt throughout the state of Connecticut. When support services are cut for our children, all of us suffer.

Here is my story: my husband and I moved here from Florida 5 years ago so Jamie could have a better life. Our plan was to buy a condo for Jamie and some friends close to the center of West Hartford so they can be as independent as possible. We thought that we would save the state so much money because all 3 of them could share support staff and transportation. Jamie and his friends do not need 24 hour care, but they do need some supervision. We were so excited about Jamie's future only to have our dreams shattered by a provider telling us that there is no money to support Jamie outside of our home. We were told that he is going to live with us until Phil and I die and then Jamie's brother and sister would need to take care of him due to lack of funding from DDS. We were told that we could provide services for him if we could afford to pay \$90,000 per year for the rest of his life. I just sat and cried.

Jamie is a very articulate young man who has dreams of going to college, being a preschool teacher and marrying his girlfriend. He wants to live a full and meaningful life, as do our other 2 children. Jamie has touched so many lives in his 19 years – we should all be so lucky to change the world for the better just by being in it. He continually teaches people about love, hard work, compassion and ability. Do all of us do that on a daily basis? Do not underestimate the impact our children have on the world. Do not disregard them because they need a little extra help, they are very capable.

All of us have a moral obligation to treat everyone with dignity and respect. How do you measure someone's worth? How much money they have, how many degrees they have achieved or how many motion pictures they have starred in? What about the intangibles.....are you a better person for knowing them, is the world a better place because they are in it? Jamie has no degrees, he has no money and has never starred in a major motion picture (although, our home movies are hilarious) but he fills the world with love – pure, and unadulterated. People are drawn to him because he is kind and thoughtful. He has excellent manners – always holds the door open for people, always says, "ladies first" when ordering at a restaurant and helps the ladies on with their coats. He puts most other men to shame with his manners! Everyone can learn from him!!!

Without services, our children are left to sit on a couch for 12 hours a day watching meaningless television, without social interaction from peers. Would you want that for your children? What about their hopes and dreams? Are they any less important because our children need support services to help them? What about the real possibility that Jamie will have to live with us for the rest of our lives? Jamie and I had a meeting with Dr. Macy last month and I talked about what will happen to Jamie when we are gone. Jamie has had nightmares from that discussion. He wakes up at night screaming, "Mommy, don't die", he is afraid to stay home alone now and perseverates on death and dying every day. What will happen to him when we are gone? The trauma of losing his parents, his home and then transitioning to a strange place with strangers or worse yet, multiple strange places is incomprehensible.

Our children and I bet your children, do not do well with trauma and change. The idea of waiting for the last parent to die and then finding a placement, wherever, for our children is inhumane. Most parents worry about what will happen to our children – who will care for them when we are gone, will our other children have to be their caregivers?

I truly believe that Commissioner Macy and everyone who works for the DDS system want to help us but there is no money. The system is irreparably broken and now we have to find a way to make it work for all of us who need help.

Here is what I see that can help:

- 1) No more budget cuts to DDS
- 2) Give back the \$30 million that was cut last year
- 3) Increase the annual budget of DDS
- 4) Allow DDS to keep all of their savings within DDS – if clients are moved from more expensive to less expensive housing

We are looking for solutions to a very difficult and expensive problem. Please consider our suggestions – money is not the only answer to this question but it is a good place to start.

Thank You!