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S.B. No. 364 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING'S
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVISIONS TO THE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING INITIATIVE
STATUTE.

Thank you to Sen. Bartolomeo, Rep. Butler and Members of the Housing Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on S.B. 364.

I am the parent of a 23 year old son with Down Syndrome who, I expect, will be ready to live with a good deal of independence in the community in the not too distant future.

Sadly, under the current system, he will not receive any help from the Department of Developmental Services.

DDS is currently administering a bifurcated system of residential assistance for adults with developmental disabilities. The majority are being served by underfunded private providers. Their employees include hardworking men and women, union and non-union, who, in my opinion, are grossly underpaid for their valuable work.

A substantial minority are being served at wildly inefficient state-employee run facilities that provide assistance at a price tag that is too high to be sustainable. For example, over 500 individuals are served at Southbury Training School and the 5 Regional Centers at a cost of approximately \$400,000 per person annually. State run group homes cost almost three times more to operate than comparable homes operated by private providers.

If this current system continues, thousands of individuals with intellectual disabilities, who are either desperately waiting for residential services, or who will need to access them tomorrow, will never receive services due to a lack of funds.

The result is that, right now, according to DDS' own figures, the residential waiting list includes 70 people that the department considers "emergencies", and over 900 additional people that are categorized as "Priority 1", meaning they will need residential supports in the next year. This does not even include the over 1,300 additional individuals that DDS identifies as individuals that will be seeking residential services over the longer term (Priority 2 and 3), nor the almost 1,000 that will become eligible for DDS adult services in the next 3 years.

Clearly, DDS needs to find a way to provide residential supports to people on the waiting list, but the current system with its high costs is preventing that from happening. Initiatives like SB 364 can help.

Past systems relied upon institutions and, more recently, group homes—which were one size fits all systems.

Today, the thinking among disability advocates and providers is not "what kind of group home is best for you", but rather, "where can you live, with the proper level of supports, that maximizes your ability to live as a full, contributing member of the community." For many people, that is a home or apartment, with or without roommates, outfitted with assistive technology, and with supports funded in part by the State, and in part provided by family and friends.

This has the distinct advantage of being less expensive than institutions and even traditional group homes, while at the same time providing a true opportunity for people to become part of their community. This is "supportive housing."

The legislature has provided funding for supportive housing through DMHAS and DSS, and SB 364 extends the initiative to include DDS. **I urge your support.**

I do not believe that DDS has, right now, either an effective plan or sufficient expertise throughout the department to move to the new paradigm of supported community living. I do think that, unlike past administrations, there has been a recognition that things must change, and a willingness to implement that change. By including DDS in this bill, you send a clear message that the agency must move more quickly and with greater creativity.

The number of individuals waiting for DDS residential services grows daily. The State must develop a system that provides needed services at a sustainable cost, —rather than simply having individuals languish on a residential waiting list.

Supportive housing, like that envisioned in SB 364 can be part of that system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony.