

Testimony of Foundala Weyman, Assistant Administrator for Network, Inc.  
Before the Public Health Committee, March 19, 2014  
*Supporting:* HB 5534, An Act Concerning the Provision of Services to Individuals with  
Intellectual Disabilities

I would like to thank Senator Gerratana, Rep. Johnson and the members of the Public Health Committee for allowing me to speak today.

Good Afternoon. My name is Foundala Weyman. Presently, I am an assistant administrator at a Network, Inc. group home for individuals with intellectual disabilities. I am also a member and delegate of the New England Health Care Employees Union, SEIU District 1199. I have worked at Network for more than four years and in the human service industry for over 13 years.

In addition to being a healthcare worker I am also a married mother of three. My oldest child is 8 and he is on the autism spectrum. However, he is doing well in school and is on grade level in most of his classes.

I'm here both as a parent and as a human service worker to tell you how important House Bill 5534 is for our state. Working in the human service industry has been a life-long dream of mine. It has been a blessing, rewarding and fulfilling experience. I never could have imagined the impact we have on the lives of others.

The client I remember most was Misty. I am still astounded by her drive, personality and spirit. Sometimes people would stare at her and give dirty looks. I once asked her if those people upset her. She told me, "Faun, you shouldn't worry about how other people see you, it only matters how you see yourself." I believe she was absolutely correct, especially because she eventually got out of her group home and opened her own diner in South Bend, Indiana.

Not only do I believe I gained my passion for my work through her actions, but many people with developmental disabilities were made to feel like they could be contributing members of society because of her—no matter how great or small a contribution.

What I see now, however, is that human services in our state are being cut – just the kind of services that enabled Misty to live her best life and her dream. Even families able to care for their loved ones now at home are worried about what will happen when they can't do it any longer – or they're not around. The promises that we have made as a state

to provide a full range of services to meet the needs of each individual and family are being broken.

Whenever we or our clients raise these issues, we are told over and over – well there just isn't any money for these "legacy" services. Residential placements are a thing of the past in both the public and the private sector. And if we are going to put more money in, where is it going to come from? All too often, the answer is: we're going to have to take it from you, the people who provide the services and from your family.

I was overwhelmed when I came to my agency over four years ago and went to our contract negotiations and heard about cuts, back then. I had just gotten this job, having been in the human services industry for 8 years at that point, and was proud to be hired by a company, doing what I love, and able to make a decent wage. I was going to start at a wage of \$15 per hour. I would be able to pay for food for my family and get a car.

Prior to getting this job, I qualified for food stamps because of the low wages I made at my non-union job. I would now be able to save my house from foreclosure. My autistic child would continue to have a roof over her head and live in a safe environment. Needless to say, I was enthusiastic about my new job and eager to get involved with the union.

Without this bill, our clients – who are also our neighbors, our friends and our family members – face a future of uncertainty and limitations. And we, the human service workers, face 'McDonald's' wages and will not be able to provide the quality of care our clients deserve. I know we would all want good quality care if we had a family member in this situation.

Thank you for your time ladies and gentlemen. We all have a story to tell, many different paths and opinions. However, we all should have a common goal to protect and serve developmentally disabled individuals and the workers that care for them.