

Parent Testimony

H.B No. 5534 An Act Concerning The Provision of Services To Individuals With Intellectual Disabilities

I am a single parent of a medically complex developmentally disabled 12-year-old son with autism and co-morbid mental health disorders. In addition, I volunteer to help other families with medically complex and developmentally disabled children.

The cuts to DDS services impact those with developmental disabilities of all ages. My son was served by DCF Voluntary Services since he was three years old. Since these services were provided by discretionary funds, as there was no formal Voluntary Services fund for DCF, we were on pins and needles every month to see if our case worker was able to fund services for the month.

When my son became old enough, at eight years old, to move over to DDS for his Voluntary Services, he was placed on the wait list for 14 months because of budget cuts. This was at the time that the budget cuts forced those DDS-served persons who were not Title 19 qualified to lose their case managers. It is challenging enough as a family to care for complex developmentally disabled family members, but to also have to learn to be your child's case manager due to budgetary cuts to DDS put undo additional stress on families. Many persons lost their services, many caregivers had to leave employment in order to care full time for their developmentally disabled family members due to reductions and elimination of DDS services.

Many caregivers developed medical problems of their own due to both the stress of caring full time, with no breaks for their disabled family members, and the inability to find care/babysitting for their family member so that they could attend medical appointments for themselves. The additional stress on these caregivers places additional stress on the family unit, leading to divorces and family break-ups. There are little to no funds available for the respite care that is desperately needed in order to provide relief for the incredible daily stress these caregivers shoulder day after day for 20, 30, 40, 50, even 60 years. Elderly caregivers face no relief, and are at a loss to locate care for their disabled family members even when they have to be hospitalized themselves, due to DDS budget cuts.

THIS IS A TRAVESTY!!

Although my son now has services through DDS, the recent budget cuts have significantly impacted his services. Integration into the community is the focus of DDS Voluntary Services program. Behavioral mentors' hourly expense budget was cut from \$4 to \$2, which is supposed to cover not only mileage and gas for the mentor, but food for the mentee. For dollars was incredibly low to begin with, and the cut to \$2 impedes the integration into community activities because of the cost to attend the activities, and the travel required to reach these community activities, most of which are located outside of the local vicinity.

Families counted on the yearly expense account to provide additional therapeutic activities for their DDS family member that they were unable to afford themselves. These activities included special needs occupational therapy in a normalized gymnastic setting, therapeutic horseback riding, and autism social skills groups. These budgets, which were low to begin with, were slashed in **HALF** with the latest round of budget cuts.

Many families whose family members are Title 19 qualified, and therefore have a yearly budget are in constant fear of additional budget cuts that we have been assured are forthcoming.

Families of developmentally disabled persons are often left to wonder...are our family members forgotten because many do not have the capability to cast votes at the polls? We certainly hope not.

In the words of the activist Dan Wilkins, "A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all."

Linda Ladden, S.N.
Vice-President | CT Student Nurses Association
Secretary | NVCC Student Nurses 2014 Club
NVCC Student Government Representative Student Nurses 2014
CT Board of Regents Student Representative
CT Board of Regents SAC Student Affairs Co-Chairman
Naugatuck Valley Community College 2014
Vice-Chair | Wallace Middle School Governance Council
Cell: 203.809.9010 | Email: lladden@live.com