

Legislators and other interested parties. Thank you for permitting me the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations. I share my thoughts on behalf of my severely mentally disabled brother. He is a resident of a group home operated through The Connecticut Institute for the Blind ("CIB").

As you know, the present issue deals with a bill that, among other things, regulates funding for DDS. This agency essentially creates the framework for services to our most vulnerable, the mentally disabled. Obviously, this would include monetary allocations for caregivers as well, be they institutional or individual.

Surely no reasonable person could doubt that there is a direct correlation between the resources available for care of the disabled, and the quality of services that the disabled receive. Make no mistake: a failure to provide truly adequate funding will diminish the standard of living of the disabled. This population deserves to be enfranchised enough to meet their basic needs. Moreover, caregivers affected by funding perform a service that can be equated only to that of parent to child. Through their organizations, they humanize the disabled in a way at few others could or would. As individuals, at the risk of being vulgar, these caregivers even have to change soiled diapers. All they seek in return is the fair means and compensation through which to continue this often thankless job.

Many groups are the beneficiaries of governmental money. All fair-minded people would agree that segments of the population that require assistance to meet even the most basic needs should benefit from the moral proprieties of a civilized nation. Certainly the population that DDS serves is one such segment. Sadly, they are the most incapable of self-advocacy, and therefore the most easily forgotten.

Ironically, many recipients of state dollars that need the money much less than this group receive much more. Please allow me to illustrate. As lawmakers, consider how much of the state budget goes to education. No reasonable person would suggest this is not money well-spent. However, those dollars go to *supplement* programs that already have a tax base upon which to draw. The beneficiaries of those dollars already have a floor; you simply decide to elevate their ceiling. Unfortunately, the disabled enjoy no such base minimum in the absence of state funding.

How much grant money does the state award every year for the arts? Again, these dollars are surely well-spent, but they go to support pursuits, rather than to help preserve the underlying support structure necessary to maintain the basic subsistence needs of people *incapable* of caring for themselves. How much money does the state pay out through the Rental Assistance Program, the beneficiaries of which certainly need a helping hand, but who are generally able-bodied and of sound mind? How much money goes to support dependent families that legitimately need help, but that also have the wherewithal to *choose* to expand their number of dependents, and thereby receive a commensurate increase in benefits? The list goes on and on.

I am not here to suggest that any of that money is poorly-spent. Rather, we, as a civilized society spend it thusly because we recognize the fundamental fairness associated with such a societal

support structure. But, consider the contrast between these groups. In truth, what segment of the population needs our help the most, much more than any of these other groups whose members have voices? Without question, it is the mentally disabled, those who cannot speak for themselves. *They* are the truly dependent; even for a voice, they must rely entirely on others. In good conscience, how can we allow even one dollar to be spent on something or someone that does not need it nearly as much as the genuinely helpless among us.

As state legislators you are in position of trust; you are the stewards of the public good. Inasmuch as this population deserves adequate funding to have their basic human needs met through the resources you control, you are their *de facto* guardians. Naturally, you owe every state resident a fiduciary duty to manage tax dollars appropriately. But, what more appropriate expenditure can there possibly be than to provide DDS with sufficient resources to ensure proper care for the segment of our population that needs care the most?

The whole concept of state welfare assistance rests on the premise that certain people, for whatever reason, cannot meet their needs. This demographic is precisely that; these people are incapable and debilitated through no fault of their own, and most often, the cruel hand of fate further renders them unable to improve or self-advocate. It is incumbent upon you to be the guardians that you have been elected to be. I implore you to recognize the following objective truth: spending even one dollar for benefits for anyone cannot be justified unless it is first spent to adequately maintain the support structure of those that truly need it the most.

Thank you for time and consideration.