

William C. Borla
HB 5534

Testimony in support of **HB 5534 - An Act Concerning the Provision of Services to Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities** for use at the Public Health Committee public hearing on **Wednesday, March 19, 2014**

I'm submitting this testimony in favor of HB 5534 because of my personal knowledge about the valuable services provided by agencies who care for persons with intellectual disabilities. In my case, the agency is Oak Hill.

I can personally attest to the wonderful job that Oak Hill does. I have a daughter who will be 47 years old at the end of March. She has been under the care of Oak Hill since she was 14 because she is multiply, physically challenged due to cerebral palsy and needs one on one care. She can't walk or talk and uses a wheelchair for mobility. We would have gotten her to Oak Hill at an earlier age had we been aware of its fine reputation. She has come a long way with the help of Oak Hill. I can tell you my family and I are very grateful for the care my daughter has received.

Initially she resided at the Oak Hill campus in Hartford and then was fortunate to be moved into the group home scenario and has lived at three homes. Currently she is residing with five other clients in the Middlebury group home.

I have found that, for the most part, the Oak Hill Staff is a very caring group of people. They do an excellent job caring for the clients. That is important to the family because it gives you peace of mind knowing your loved one is being properly cared for. I consider it a difficult job and I'm appreciative of the hard work they do on behalf of the clients. What I have found to be especially gratifying is the work the house managers, and I'm sure the managers above them, do in advocating for the clients. I have found the Oak Hill staff to be proactive, to take the initiative, to come up with good ideas, and to doggedly pursue solutions that improve the quality of life for their clients. Of course, at times there have been some glitches, but these have been fairly rare. And when we have brought our concerns to the attention of the staff, they have listened and responded in an appropriate and timely manner.

Oak Hill introduced my daughter to computers when she was at the campus in Hartford. Now she communicates by using a computer and she has progressed to where she can email her family and friends. To me this is astounding. I never imagined that she would be able to do that. It has been a huge advancement in her ability to communicate and in her quality of life. The primary reason for much of the progress my daughter has made is due to the advocacy and work of the managers. The computers are expensive, the computer connections can be

complicated and expensive, and it takes time to teach my daughter some of the intricacies of the computers so she can make effective use of them. Now she can select the clothes she wants to wear; the food she wants to eat; what she wants to drink; the activities she wants to do; the places she wants to go; etc. It all has added much more happiness in her life. The Oak Hill staff sees to it that my daughter gets excellent medical attention. The staff is very accommodating with regard to getting my daughter to outings with her family, shopping and community activities. Overall she has been very happy and healthy. As we look back over the 33 years my daughter has been at Oak Hill, we realize how truly fortunate it has been for her and for her family that she got the care provided by Oak Hill.

Specifically, with regard to the funding situation, here are two examples of how inadequate funding has affected my daughter. She used to attend a day program run by the state on Alvord Park Road in Torrington. It was a wonderful program. Then little by little, we noticed it began to deteriorate to the point where we felt it necessary to find another program. We were fortunate to find an Oak Hill day program in Seymour. As far as I know, there was no overt plan to phase out the state program. We weren't notified that the program was being phased out and given a "heads up" to begin looking for another program. It's just that positions weren't filled and clients, like my daughter, were doing nothing but sitting around getting bored all day.

At one time a woman was hired by the state on a temporary basis to work in the day program for six months. She came up with the idea to have my daughter run a "Book Nook", as she called it. It was a great idea. My daughter collected donated books and brought them down to the Southbury Training School where she was able to sell them. She didn't make much money, but that was beside the point. This was an opportunity for her to get out in the community and interact with people, which she loves to do. At the end of six months there were no funds to hire the woman permanently and she was let go. With her went the "Book Nook" project. Nobody else was available to take it over.

The bottom line is that you can eliminate programs, but you can't eliminate the people who need them. The quality of life for my daughter and many others who have to deal with serious issues is on the decline. These are the most vulnerable people in our society, and they need help. They already have enough problems to overcome. It is extremely important for those of us who can help to do something to help them. Adequate funding is the key to providing needed services. That's why we appeal to our legislators who can do something about funding. It's the moral and right thing to do. This problem has been going on for too many years.

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