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Tomorrow is my birthday. I'll be 56 years old.

Later this year, my son Evan will be 25.

I figure if I'm very, very fortunate, I'll be able to keep working at a paid job for another 25, maybe even 30 years, until I die. At that point Evan will have perhaps another 30 years left to live – years my husband and I must do everything we can now to provide for when we're gone. I can't think of another group of citizens who must plan to live forever.

But I'm one of the lucky ones. Because my school district agreed that Evan has a better chance at learning the skills he needs to live more independently **by actually living more independently**, Evan aged out in the residential transition program at Vista Vocational & Life Skills Center. Because of that decision, DDS policy provided funding for life skills support and the continuing education provided in Vista's day program. Evan is just now maturing into capability, and Vista's trained staff and innovative programming is helping him learn to participate fully in the world. And because of that, I am able to transition from being Evan's caregiver to full employment. Now I'm a taxpayer again, and Evan may yet become one, because our town and our state have invested in that possibility.

Without that investment, my son would join thousands of others whose education through high school has been pointless; who are unprepared for life outside of the home they will have to leave when their parents die; and who will be much more expensive than emergencies than they would be if our families and communities could count on intelligent and compassionate forward planning.

If you cut DDS funding, not only do you fail to serve the people you've heard from today who are so desperately underserved - you undo the good that has been done. If you cut DDS funding, you must offer parents like me some alternatives. You must let us keep some of the income we pay in taxes; you must let us leverage our assets into future income for our I/DD family members; you must let us create savings and investment instruments, partnerships with service providers, real estate trusts, student loans, whatever it takes not only to make up what you take away but to develop a brighter future.

If you cut DDS funding, you will compel families, extended families, service providers, employers – in short, the large network of people who will be affected – to challenge the value of public education in our state and to question the motives of leaders who allow us to be discriminated against because our families are atypical.

If, however, you're willing to work with us, invest in us, we can create schools, workplaces and communities that sustain not only my child, but **your** child – **your** spouse - **your** veteran – **your** parents and grandparents – all of our citizens who will, at some point in their lives, be one of us.

Be one **with** us. Thank you.