

3-5-15
Denise Walstra
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Dear Governor Dan Malloy,

My concern about the proposed 14 million dollar budget cuts to DDS this year have me and other families concerned for the welfare of the disabled people and families who take care of them.

The 5 million dollar reduction in employment and day services, 5.1 million DDS employee positions, 1.6 million in VSP which supports families with children with mental health needs and 2.2 million in cuts to other critical programs which cut so deeply will be detrimental to many who need these funds to survive.

Morna Murray as the new commissioner is required to implement these fatal cuts.

Without the personal funding allocated to us from the state, our family would cease to exist as we know it. The funding gives us some level of comfort and normality to a family who has a non verbal 19 yr. old girl with Angelman Syndrome who cannot be left alone, has a history of seizures and intellectual disability.

When you have been up all night with a child who has a sleeping disorder associated with her disability, it's a daunting task to face the day of working in your chosen profession. You want to be a contributing member of society as you imagined when in college. Quickly, days and nights roll into one another like a blur. You begin to fixate on your fatigue and depression sets in. You begin to bicker with your spouse more often about who takes responsibility for your daughter along with cleaning the house, cooking dinner and running to brothers and sisters soccer games. When you raise a child with a disability who needs constant supervision, you cannot read the paper, you cannot watch a TV show to the end, you cannot take a nap, ever! Your social circle is reduced greatly.

To off set the costs of raising a special needs daughter, this funding is absolutely necessary for our family to function. Without this funding, our family would be rendered helpless!

Years ago, when our family was introduced to a DDS caseworker and to The Arc of New London County there was hope on the horizon. DDS provided funding to have an aide from The Arc come into our home and assist us with baths, supper and preparing for the next day and we finally got to rest and live a more normal existence!

The aides came with us on outings so we could socialize with the community and not always have one eye open to see if our child was taking someone's food or running into the road or eloping the scene just because something looked enticing.

I began to join a church committee and educational committees and helped other parents on suggestions of how to receive help with their child's education, or consulting with parents to apply for recreational services which these children and adults desperately need.

You must understand, they cannot go to sleepovers or birthday parties by themselves. They don't join girl scouts without an aide in tow. They cannot play conventional sports, or join a dancing group. They need help with everything. They need help with toileting and are on strict schedules. They have communication devices and boards that go with them everywhere they go. The family is their social life unless there are safe recreational programs for them to attend to make them feel independent and proud!

You cannot hire just any babysitter because they need to be trained and compassionate people who are willing to get pushed, get their hair pulled when our special people are anxious or frustrated. They need to be willing to take our daughter out in the community so she can share in experiences most people share in such as tubing in the river, or going on a bike trail, going to the beach, library, supermarket or backyard party. You cannot do this with your special needs child and their siblings by yourself. You must take the aides along with you because it is completely and utterly impossible to do these outings on your own.

There are families who can't seem to get the funding necessary even for their full grown child and have to pass on many social opportunities for themselves because they have become full time care takers. The parents and their disabled child's lives are so crippled and limited without funding. You are merely surviving, not thriving.

These sweet individuals with disabilities did not ask for this to be their fate. It is up to us to help them have a social life and a rewarding life to be proud of. They desperately look to us for guidance and love and want to please us! We need to give them a reason to want to find a vocation and live as close to a normal life as possible. Our special people want to make us proud and they don't want to be a burden! Without the help of aides from The Arc of New London County and their special services for people living with disabilities, and respite programs, it is impossible for these disabled individuals to live happily.

My request is for The Appropriations Committee to stop the cuts to DDS, and to please consider restoring budgets for our disabled loved ones and their very dependent families.

Sincerely,

Denise Walstra RDH
(Board member of The Arc of New London County)