

Dear Appropriations Committee,

I am the parent of an adult son with autism and a provider of autism education and supports. I am deeply concerned about the Governor's proposed DDS budget cuts. While I certainly understand that the state must reduce spending, these cuts will have a devastating effect on children and adults with disabilities and their families. There has to be another way to balance a budget without harming our most vulnerable citizens.

While my family is lucky because my son already has a residential placement and attends an adult day program, most of the families I know struggle to keep their children and themselves safe on a day-to-day basis. For example, there is a divorced woman in New Canaan who has a severely autistic son that she alone cares for. She has had several strokes and worries that at any moment both her and her son's life will be at risk if she has another stroke while home alone with him. What will become of her son if she is suddenly incapacitated? He can't call 911.

Cutting funding to residential providers while re-opening admission to the much more expensive state run group homes does not make sense. Not only do these homes cost us all much more to operate right now, these homes are generally not as well run as those operated by private providers. And, as these funding cuts will continue to forced private providers to close or give back homes to the state, the blow-back will be overall higher costs and poorer quality services. We will increasingly pay more for less services.

There are thousands of people on the waiting list for a residential placement with little hope of seeing their children in a reasonably safe environment unless both parents die, and there is already little possibility of a placement. This budget will take those few opportunities to provide safe living situations away for years to come.

Elimination of adult day supports will mean that parents will have to give up their jobs when they are in their peak earning years to care for their children, and they themselves will likely have to rely on state programs both now and when they have no retirement funds to support themselves later in life.

The Voluntary Service Program is often utilized to assist families whose children have extremely challenging and dangerous behaviors. A 60% reduction in these supports will mean that the only recourse left a parent is to call 911 to have their children transported to an ER or psych ward. This will cost us all even more than funding the VSP in the long run. Not just in dollars but also in human suffering and injury.

DDS funding is already cut to the bone. Further cuts will dramatically change people's lives.

Please do not take these services away from our loved ones. They already have so much less than the rest of us.

Yours truly,
Suzanne Letso, Resident of Newtown
CEO
Connecticut Center for Child Development
95 Wolf Harbor Road
Milford, CT