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Attention Appropriations Committee,

I am disappointed to hear of the plans to drastically cut funding to the Department of Developmental Services Voluntary Services Program. After 12/14, there was so much talk of reaching out to families that were isolated and struggling. All were encouraged to lend a helping hand to those vulnerable and at risk in our communities. The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission made many recommendations including #5 in their Mental and Behavioral Health Recommendations: "To promote healthy child development and foster robust communities, our system of care must attend to the factors affecting family welfare. Current funding structures must be revamped. The Commission recommends support for models of integrated care driven by family needs in which all providers focus on family strength, address their risk factors, and accept the family as a partner in treatment." How is cutting funding to a program that provides in-home supports for Connecticut children with dual diagnosis of both a developmental disorder and a behavioral or emotional disorder in any way consistent with the recommendations made in the SHAC report?

I have seen first-hand how a family in our town struggles every day to care for their 14 year-old daughter who has both autism and severe behavioral challenges. The child I speak of has a big heart and will bring a smile to your face with her hugs and enthusiasm for the theater and costumes. This same child has extreme tantrums that involve aggression – biting, pulling hair and punching. This aggression is often targeted not only at her parents, but also her two younger siblings. She requires assistance with activities of daily living such as eating, bathing, toileting and dressing. The Voluntary Services Program allows the parents to self-hire highly qualified staff who can come into their home to not only help with daily care, but also to teach independent living skills and appropriate replacement behaviors when an aggressive tantrum begins. The staff funded by the VSP also allows the mother and father time to parent their two younger children who, like any children, require the attention of their parents.

I ask you to protect the children of Connecticut who are vulnerable and at risk. The family I speak of is one of many who need the VSP to survive as an intact family. Please do not leave these families isolated and struggling to make it through a day. Please choose to restore the funding to The Department of Developmental Services Voluntary Services Program.

Thank you.