

Public Hearing on the Budget for The Department of Developmental Services

March 6, 2015

Testimony

Stephen Tracy

203 Ivy Mountain Road
Goshen, Connecticut 06756
stephentrac7@gmail.com

I am testifying today in opposition to the funding reductions for the Department of Developmental Services as proposed in the Governor's budget.

I am the father of three adult children, the eldest of whom has been severely disabled since his birth in 1970. My wife, Mary, and I will never forget our meeting with the doctors at Children's Hospital in Philadelphia just a few months after Christopher's birth when they told us that our son had no chance for a normal life, that he would likely never walk or speak. As it turned out, he did eventually learn to walk – although not until he was nine years old. He never did learn to speak – but in his own way, he has had a lot to say about what it means to be a human being, a son and a brother.

Christopher grew up in our home with our two younger siblings and with lots of help from the public schools that he attended, from our friends and neighbors and from many dedicated doctors. But when he turned twenty, we knew that we had to find a way for Christopher to have a life outside of our home. And, as the parents of any seriously handicapped child will tell you, we began wondering what would happen to our son when we grew too old to care for him.

To our good fortune, our search led us to a wonderful organization in the Danbury area then known as Datahr, now Ability Beyond. Since 1990, Christopher has lived in an Ability Beyond group home on a quiet

street in New Milford. Thanks to Ability Beyond, he has the 24/7 supervision that he requires. His health and diet are carefully monitored. He's a volunteer for Meals on Wheels. He participates in Special Olympics. He goes shopping. He has friends. He has a life. We could not be more thankful.

But there is a challenging, sometimes discouraging side to this story. As a long time member of the Ability Beyond Board of Trustees, I know how difficult it has been to maintain the financial viability of the organization. Like the many other private community providers who serve disabled citizens throughout our state, Ability Beyond relies heavily on funding from the Department of Developmental Services. That funding has been woefully inadequate over the years, lagging far behind the funding provided to government operated services for the disabled. This has been true even though the evidence is clear that providers like Ability Beyond deliver a superior quality of service at a cost significantly below that of government run institutions. The funding gap is so serious that we, as parents and concerned citizens, must devote most of our time to raising the millions of dollars that are required to bridge the gap between what the state provides and what our loved ones require.

The cuts to the DDS budget that are reflected in the Governor's budget will make this tough situation even worse. In the long run, these sorts of reductions may well threaten the very viability of organizations like ours. Imagine the additional costs the state would incur -- imagine how long the waiting lists would be -- if highly regarded, cost effective community providers were no longer around to help care for the deserving individuals whom we serve.

I urge you to craft a budget that keeps faith with the disabled citizens of our state who count on the Department of Developmental Services by fully funding its budget over the next two years.

Thank you.

