

March 6, 2015

**Testimony regarding DDS Budget**

My name is Sandra Trionfini and I am an attorney with the Waterbury office of Connecticut Legal Services, LLC. (CLS). Since 1990, my practice has included the representation of individuals with developmental and intellectual disability and, at present, this is exclusively my practice.

Since the mid-1980s, CLS has provided legal representation and advocacy services on behalf of thousands of individuals with intellectual and developmental disability throughout Connecticut. As part of this representation, we receive grants through the Office of Protection and Advocacy (OP & A) to represent both class members of **C.A.R.C. vs. Thorne** (the litigation that resulted in the closing of Mansfield Training School) and the **Messier vs. Southbury Training School** Settlement Agreement. We have the perspective of representing individuals, with our advocacy services and other legal representation, through many decades of their lives and have watched the quality of their lives improve as they transitioned from institutional settings into the community.

Our advocacy services were available to several hundred individuals as they transitioned from Mansfield Training School into the community in the beginning of the 1990s. We were able to remain on interdisciplinary teams once our clients moved into their community living arrangements, offering the private provider agencies involved our perspectives and familiarity with the needs of the individuals. In this regard, we were able to go forward with life planning strategies in a meaningful manner, offering choices that were unheard of while our clients resided at Mansfield. We are, once again, seeing this happen as individuals move out of Southbury Training School.

Community placement can make a profound impact on the quality of life of an individual with intellectual disability. We have seen tremendous quality of life changes for the better as individuals expand their lives to include better family and community interaction in a lesser restrictive setting. Individuals thrive in small home settings when they are able to access life choices that the rest of us take for granted. As we are able to follow individuals from institutional settings into smaller homes with our advocacy, we have witnessed first hand these transformations. We have seen individuals re-connect with families for the first time in many years, as they are able to move closer to loved ones and are able to reside in smaller, home settings. Individuals grow in independence as they are able to conduct simple life activities, such as grocery shopping, clothes shopping and dining out with friends and family, activities which were difficult in their prior living situations.

The proposed budget cuts for DDS are catastrophic to the individuals we serve as well as to their families and loved ones. Individuals with disabilities can live meaningful lives with minimal supports, if

given the chance. To withdraw supports such as day programs and individualized budgets can mean life or death to individuals who rely on such supports for their day to day care. We urge you to restore the planned budget cuts so that these individuals can enjoy the lives they deserve.

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