

Testimony –Human Services subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee-March 6, 2015

Good Evening Chairman Walker, members of the human services portion of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Varian Salters. I live in Willimantic, CT and vote in the 49<sup>th</sup> Assembly District. I am here tonight to ask that you to please Restore DDS funding and funding for the DDS Waiting List. Fifteen years ago I lived with my parents in Coventry and applied for help from DDS. Eventually I was found eligible for services but was placed on the waitlist. During this time I was unemployed, hopeless and depressed. I spent my days, sleeping, watching TV and occasionally fighting with my parents because none of us could see any way out. My parents worried every day about what would happen to me when they passed away.

Today I live in my own Apartment alone and hire my own staff to help me with Cleaning my Apartment, Cooking, Banking and Transportation to People First of Connecticut meetings. I get up and go to work in the field of self-advocacy four days a week. I am involved in Governor Malloy's Working Group for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities with his liaison Jonathan Slifka. I am the treasurer of People First a statewide group of people with developmental disabilities having served in the past as Vice President as well. I have attended SABE conferences all over the U.S. and met with my Congressmen in Washington during the National Disability Seminar in 2013. I am busy with my Best Buddies and go to dances, movies, sports events etc. I am a positive, productive member of my community where everyone knows my name. Why? What caused this change in my life? **I got off of the wait list.** When a DDS consumer is on the wait list it affects the whole family and their community; from the loss of a productive worker to the increased cost of medical care caused by emotional distress. I have friends on the Waiting List that still live with their families at home. The parents worry constantly about the future and more so as they age and lose their own strength. Their child is stressed by the tension in the family and the desire for a life like everyone else. I want my friends to get the same opportunity to move into their own apartments and hire their own staff. I want the parents to have the relief of knowing their loved one will be cared for and live a full life. My dad recently passed away but I know I'm going to be ok because I have the stability and support I need to keep going.

You, the Appropriations Committee, have the power to change the lives of people with I/DD and their families by giving them hope. Please restore funding for DDS so Connecticut residents with significant needs will be able to obtain essential life supporting services and then increase the amount of funding in the DDS budget line item to get everyone off of the wait list. The power to give and save lives is in your hands. Thank you for listening to my story and to my plea that others need your help as well.