

Finance Committee Testimony on Bill No. SB 1135
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I'd like to thank all of the legislators for making time today to hear our concerns.

My husband and I have two sons, Kyle and Clay, both of whom carry the diagnoses of autism and intellectual disability. The proposed cuts to the DDS budget would devastate our family in different ways.

My son Kyle is 21 now, and in June will graduate from the school system and move completely into the adult services world. If the proposed DDS budget is passed, Kyle will be a victim of the "no new grad funding" line item cut. Rather than having day program funding, as the young adults who are currently 21 or over, he would receive nothing. Every family in this category will have to face terrible choices. What will my child do all day? Will he sit at home? Will one parent need to stay home with him, and if so does that mean someone will have to quit their job in order to do this? Will we need to pay for his day program ourselves? And, can we even afford that? And our young adult children, who have spent 18 years in the school system working hard on skills to foster their independence, will suddenly fall off a cliff and revert to a passive life in their family home. We cannot let this happen.

Let me tell you about my other son, Clay, who is 19. Clay has autism, along with a severe intellectual disability, very limited language, and extreme (and sometimes violent) mood swings. He's also 6'2" and frighteningly strong. He is in the DDS Voluntary Services Program, whose mandate it is to keep children from being institutionalized. VSP services have helped him to be more active, busier, happier, and his negative behaviors have declined dramatically. VSP saved our family. And, as you know, the VSP budget has been cut by a whopping \$19.9 million, or over 60%. These budget cuts would scale back a support system that is keeping our fragile family afloat.

As you also know, there is a crisis in housing for our children, with over 2,000 people on the waiting list for residential placements. At the moment, based on the lack of funding available, DDS has the strategy of having our children live at home with only day supports (assuming they're not a new grad . . . in which case they don't even receive that) until our own deaths or disability. On the face of it, this makes some sense, as this allows funding dollars to be stretched further. However, it is a truly flawed plan, and a disaster in the long term. My husband and I are in our 50s, and our boys are entering their 20s. Others here today are in their 60s, and 70s, still caring for their adult-children at home. For those who choose that path, I respect it as a choice. But you'll find that many, or even most, parents want their children to have the ability to live more independently, and are unable to sustain caring for their children forever. I will tell you, my husband and

I are exhausted. And, the path of having our children live with us forever, burdening our young men with a child-like existence inside their parents' house, and then creating a devastating transition someday when we die . . . that is unfair to all concerned. Our families need options, based on the needs of each child, which will provide them with the opportunities for an independent life.

We recognize that the resources required by our disabled population are not small. In a perfect world, there would be something else unnecessary or frivolous in the budget which could be cut, and this would allow us to easily fill in the DDS budgetary needs. Sadly, that is not the case. I know that the Appropriations Committee members are working hard to set priorities. But we also recognize that raising revenue to meet these vital needs is needed, and that's where your job is critical. Although raising taxes is not easy, not is it a popular choice, we are a state of great resources. Please support my family, and families like mine, who need your help to find the revenue to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you.