

March 17, 2015

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to submit electronic testimony about tomorrow's hearing on S.B. 1088 - An Act Concerning Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disability. I am the co-guardian for my brother, Robert Hirschberg, a resident at Southbury Training School in Cottage 17. I strongly urge you to vote NO on this bill.

As a public school teacher in Connecticut, I am well aware of the prevailing philosophies about the least restrictive environment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. For individuals with less severe retardation, community placement may be the least restrictive and most appropriate. For my brother, whose disability is severe, Southbury Training School is clearly the most appropriate environment compared with community placement. My brother has been a resident at Southbury Training school for nearly 40 years. The staff at the facility has created programming that maximizes his potential even though he is profoundly retarded with no speech. He has been surrounded by knowledgeable and caring professionals who have allowed him to live a happy and secure life. His medical needs have been met promptly and professionally when needed. My family and I have visited often and have attended many of his PPT meetings.

I visited a community placement home several weeks ago, accompanied by two of the professionals from Southbury Training School. I have several concerns about community placement for my brother. First, I feel that there is not as much oversight at a community placement as there is at Southbury Training School. Private providers inspect each other, while the state facility is inspected rigorously and continuously.

Second, I do not believe that a community placement can provide my brother with the full program of services he has had at Southbury Training School. The reach and scope of the facility cannot be replicated in a private setting. He has a day program, a work program, a social program, and more. Last, I have grave concerns about the funding that will be available for community placement. Patrick Johnson Jr.'s recent op ed in the CT Mirror (March 13, 2015) highlights the funding cuts that have been ongoing for many years and how this creates shortfalls for nonprofits that will impact services for people in their care.

In closing, I believe strongly that the collective power of Southbury Training School has produced the best quality of life possible for my profoundly mentally retarded brother, and I hope that you don't disrupt the only home he's known as an adult. Thank you for keeping the best interests of individuals like my brother in mind during your deliberations. Please let me know if I can provide any further information.

Judith H. Atwood
21 L'Hermitage Dr.
Shelton, CT 06484