

Testimony – March 18, 2015

Thank you Senator Gerratana and Representative Ritter and the members of the Public Health Committee for raising Bill SB-1088 .

Thank you for the opportunity to share Andy's story and to speak in favor of SB-1088. An Act Concerning Services for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disability

My son, Andy is under the care of Oak Hill, a private provider, and has been for the past 29 years. He is proof that the private provider can and does provide excellent care and has helped Andy develop into the person he is today. I would hope that 29 years later it would be easier for parents to get the help they need for their child but instead of the system improving I see it as just as cumbersome as it was 29 years ago. I truly believe it is so important to help your child transition while you are alive and can oversee the programs than to be put in a situation where your child is now 40 years plus when the transition is so much harder on everyone.

We have made so many strides in the past 29 years to give individuals with intellectual and developmental disability a better education but not a better quality of life. Sometimes I feel we are going backwards and not forwards with our thinking to offer the care they need and deserve. A group home setting, such as Andy's home, gives him independence, a social life with his peers and the chance to live longer and healthier.

Andy's life is an example of what hard work and persistence can achieve. He is healthier and happier than I could ever imagine. I am deeply concerned that all the time, effort and cost it has taken to give Andy every opportunity possible, would have been in vain, should the current proposed budget go into effect and put his home and day program in jeopardy.

Keeping qualified staff to care for individuals with special needs is of the utmost importance. Without qualified staff I would not be able to sleep at night worrying about Andy's wellbeing. In order to keep quality staff the private providers need the funds to pay a salary that will encourage individuals to go into this field. It is not an easy job to care for individuals that need 24 hour care and they are at risk if the staff is not well trained.

Why are people with Disabilities always the one on the bottom of the list to get funding? The Department of Developmental Services needs to plan in advance before the age of 21 to have programs in place for our children and the children to come. Residential placement, job opportunities, day programs should all be in place at 21 years of age to ensure the quality of life our precious children deserve.

Andy is a perfect example of how the proper funding of residential, day programs and job opportunities really enhance someone's life.

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