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Testimony for SB 1088

I'm Sue Bastien from Cheshire, supporting SB 1088. I commend our legislators for introducing this important document which may be the Key to a long overdue, systemwide change in DDS services for persons with intellectual disabilities.

Southbury Training School was built in an era, which seems so long ago, when those with intellectual disabilities were not only called retarded, but classified as idiots, imbeciles and morons. It was a time when some of their own families were ashamed and embarrassed. And the many who did cherish their children usually lacked the resources to care for them, since educational and therapeutic opportunities were virtually non-existent. While for some parents, institutionalization was a way of unburdening themselves, for many others it came with the hope of possibly obtaining some much-needed help for their child.

Times have thankfully changed. Families cherish their children with intellectual disabilities who can now grow up alongside their siblings at home. Extended families and communities have become much more supportive as well. Youngsters with ID, even at the most severe levels, are not only receiving educational services now, they are included in regular education classrooms with supports and modifications, in their own neighborhood schools. After completion of school, some require DDS-funded day programs while others are able to work at jobs in their community either with or without DDS supports. As adults, they are also able to leave home, just as their siblings do. While some can live independently, most require DDS

supports or supervision, or a DDS-funded home in the community.

Today, Southbury and the remaining Regional Centers have moved forward, too, with residents attending day programs on and off campus. If they can attend day programs off campus, one wonders, why can't they live there just as well? At an exorbitant cost to taxpayers, and to the exclusion of helping thousands on the DDS Wait List, our state has up until now taken the easy way out by simply maintaining the status quo. This has been far, far easier all along than planning and executing the intricate system necessary to desegregate Southbury and the Regional Centers and fully integrate these residents back into our communities where they belong, while also finally freeing up funds for the thousands at home who are desperately waiting for DDS help. The state must stop citing its self-proclaimed compassion for the residents, and their families who are fearful of disruption, as a major factor in delaying the closings. If the state were really that compassionate, it couldn't be so totally LACKING in compassion for the thousands of persons with ID and their families who are on the DDS Wait List, many for decades, many with aging parents, and who far outnumber the residents of Southbury and the Regional Centers combined.

It is time to close Southbury Training School and the Regional Centers, allowing these residents to reap the benefits of living in the community as fully included, valued members. It's time to share DDS funding with the thousands on the Wait List. It's time now to end this broken system. I urge you to let SB 1088 be that change.