

David Hadden
Testimony before the
Appropriations Committee
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OPPOSING PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS TO DDS

My name is David Hadden, and I am a father of an intellectually disabled young man. I first testified before the Legislature 30 years ago when my son Jamie was four years old.

Jamie does not speak. He does not walk. He cannot see. But he knows love. And he teaches others what love is on daily basis. His smile or his grimace or his magical look of wonder penetrates to the heart of our common humanity.

Jamie is one of the lucky ones. He lives in a group home beautifully run by Oak Hill. His days aren't perfect. Some days he feels like hell and we don't know why. It is a lot of work just being Jamie, with a brain and a body that so fail to match his heart and spirit. But his committed caregivers give him the attention and care and compassion he needs to make it. It's what a safety net should look like.

I received a call this summer from a father who could have been me 30 years ago. He told me of his 11-year-old son who is missing part of his brain. The boy is blind, in diapers, has daily seizures, and is unable to walk or feed himself. He wakes up during most nights making loud noises. He bites and hits himself frequently, requiring special gloves on his hand. He will cry for hours on end when agitated.

This father was reaching out to me, a fellow parent, for help because he could not obtain supports from DDS or DCF. He wrote, "we are in crisis and I feel I have already had a nervous breakdown. I feel like my only alternative is to walk away

because I can't deal with it any more. This would not be fair to my wife or other child.”

Listening to this father I remembered instantly my own helplessness and exhaustion and anguish, knowing that Jamie wasn't getting what he needed, and knowing that the toll on my wife and our other children was pushing us to a breaking point. Our safety net is not catching this family and too many others like it who are living way too close to the edge.

Instead of strengthening our safety net, we have been slowly and inexorably slicing its strands. Private non-profit providers, the most cost-effective and community-based aspect of our service delivery system, have been chronically underfunded for decades.

- The average cost of living increase to nonprofit direct care providers between 1987 and 2013 was *one percent* or about 30% in the aggregate.
- Over the same period, the consumer price index rose over *three* times as much, or 98%. Medical costs skyrocketed over *six* times as much, or 209%.
- Community providers can't maintain consistent staffing with inadequate funding.

Against this background, the DDS budget suffered rescissions of \$30 million in 2012; \$5.5 million in 2014; and \$8.4 million already this year in 2015.

The Governor's proposed budget ignores chronic long term underfunding and imposes would impose deep cuts to safety net programs.

Please provide adequate funding for community residential and employment/day services.

**Please reverse the Governor's proposed 60% reduction to the
Voluntary Services Program** serving children with urgent behavioral health needs.

Thank you for your understanding and support for our most vulnerable and
so very valuable citizens.

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