

Dear Governor Malloy:

I am very concerned, frightened, and worried about the potential budget cuts to the Department of Developmental Services (DSS) which supports and helps my handicapped child. I hope by reading this and understanding my child's needs, as well as the many other handicapped children in our State, that you will reconsider taking away any money from the budget of DSS.

As I mentioned in the above paragraph, I am a single parent of a special needs child who receives services from DSS. In 1976, my daughter, Jennifer L. Curti, at age 4, was diagnosed with Wilms Tumor, a pediatric cancer of the kidneys. She had to undergo surgery to remove her right kidney that contained a baseball size malignant tumor. She was treated for 5 years at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center with radiation and chemotherapy and endured all the terrible side effects from the treatment, including resulting brain damage.

During her school years she was in special ed classes. Immediately after high school graduation, she was accepted into the Vista Vocational and Life Skills Center in Westbrook, CT.

Vista is a program that teaches people with many different issues the skills needed to live in the "normal" world. They are taught with the help of counselors to clean, do laundry, shop for food, pay bills with their checkbooks, and everything else that the rest of us take for granted. Vista helps them find jobs and a job coach goes in to the workplace to help teach the student how to perform the job properly. Each student has an Independent Life Skills counselor that comes to their respective residences to reinforce to these skills. For people like my daughter who cannot drive, my daughter's counselor takes her to the Laundromat, to the food stores, and any where else she needs to go. She takes the bus to her job in Old Saybrook, but needs to be picked up at night by the Vista Van because the buses have stopped running. Van rides are paid for by some of the funding allotted to Jennifer. Without van rides available to her at night, her safety would be at risk. Without Vista and DSS's assistance, I firmly believe her life would be at risk.

There is so much more that Vista does to help and teach her, but it would take many more pages to explain how vital Vista and the DSS funding is to my daughter's life and well-being as well as others like her.

The funding for Vista comes from DSS because I cannot afford to pay. I have no other family that will be there for Jennifer; and when I am no longer here, I know Vista and DSS will be there to continue all their good work as long as the funding is not taken away. The "children" like my daughter who are receiving funds from DSS, are productive, contributing members of society - paying taxes and working hard. PLEASE DON'T TAKE THEIR INDEPENDENCE AWAY.

I wish I could be at the Appropriations Committee of the General Assembly on March 6th in person, but it is not possible. I am recovering from knee replacement surgery and breast cancer surgery.

If you would like to speak to me for further information, please call me on my cell phone at 203 451-9284.

Sincerely,

Susan J. Coughlin
Mother to Jennifer L. Curti