

Appropriations Committee Testimony on Bill No. 1088
Marina Derman, Westport

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and members of the Public Health Committee. I want to thank you for raising this vital bill, and taking the time to listen to us. **I am here today to support SB 1088.**

My husband and I have two sons with autism and intellectual disabilities. We are being hit in very different ways by the proposed budget cuts. My older son, Kyle, recently turned 21. He receives DDS services, and is finishing his last year in the school system. Over the past year, his DDS case manager and I have planned for the day program funding that he'd receive when he ages out of the school system this coming July. Suddenly, I am informed (only four short months before he ages out) that the day programming for new grads would not be funded under the proposed budget, and that he may receive nothing.

My younger son, Clay, is nearly 20. Of our two sons, he is the one more affected by his disabilities, and has a long and challenging history of behavioral outbursts with aggression and self-injury. He is a receiver of DDS VSP services, which have resulted in a dramatic improvement in his behaviors and in our family's life overall. Given the \$19.9 million proposed cut to VSP – a reduction of over 60% - I fear that he'll have severely reduced or even no services. I can't imagine that the department can even survive a 60% cut and still serve its mission.

My husband and I stand here, not just as families holding out our hands and saying, "Give us more." We want to be the ones saying, "Let's do this smarter." Let's use every penny of this state's resources wisely. We cannot afford to have a very small percentage of our populations receiving services in an expensive and inefficient model, while so many receive less than they need, or nothing at all.

We also believe that a more systematic and permanent approach to the issue is needed. It seems to us that the funding of many special needs programs resembles that of a pension program: It has a defined population, it has a flow of new participants that can be predicted (by looking at special needs populations in the local school systems), and people exit the system through death and moves - and thus it has costs that can be reasonably estimated using actuarial science. Debating the funding of a long-term obligation anew every two years simply makes no sense. It tends to produce arbitrary and unfair solutions, like the Governor's decision to simply stop providing funds for new graduates.

We applaud this bill's requirement to create a plan for closing Southbury and the regional centers, as well as the development of a plan to serve all those receiving DDS services. We hope that Commissioner Murray may turn this situation

around, but she'll be successful only if she's able to do it in a careful, planned manner.

Our sons, as well as the rest of the I/DD population, will be here tomorrow, next year, and 50 years from now. We need to stop going through short-sighted budget battles every two years, and instead create some long-term planning that will treat this as the predictable requirement that it truly is.