

Theresa Coyle

3 Beaudet Terrace, Columbia, CT 06237 • 860-228-1133(h) • 860-942-2088(c) • theresaanncoyle@gmail.com

Testimony Against Senate Bill 17
Before the Human Services Committee
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Hello Chairperson(s) and Members of the Committee:

I am Theresa Coyle, sister of brain injury survivor Michael Messina.

Mike was in a car accident in 1983 at the age of 19. It's been 33 years of fighting for his safety and quality of life. And the fight continues.

Mike has severe memory challenges. Continuously our family must take leaps of faith entrusting others with his care. Sadly that trust has repeatedly been broken. Although it is not often discussed, many brain injury survivors are subjected to abuse and neglect and they need to be protected. Although we have been fortunate to find some wonderful caretakers, we have also found that not all people seek caretaking positions for the right reasons. Not all providers take their management roles seriously. Mike cannot tell me or anyone what happens to him, even moments after it has occurred. I and other family members of survivors spend huge portions of our lives fighting to keep our survivors safe and fighting to ensure that they receive the caring support they need and deserve. We have no hidden agenda,

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no motives of personal gain, just the desire to keep our loved ones safe. For many of us, that commitment is what brings us here. With all of the recent threats to the ABI waivers and with all of the problems in our current service delivery system that are not being addressed, many of us do not trust that DSS decision makers will act in our survivors best interests without our advocacy. Please reaffirm the person centered principles at the core of the waiver and take positive steps that include more survivor and family member involvement in the waiver amendment process, not less. Please move forward, not backwards. Some of us are the voices of our brain injury survivors, like you are the voices of your constituents. Any attempt to silence you is an attempt to silence us. Please vote to reject this bill that would stop legislative oversight of our waivers. Your vote could make the difference in whether my brother and other survivors are safe or not. Please help us keep our survivors safe. Thank you for hearing this testimony.