Testimony of Thomas J. Weth, 59 Knollcrest Rd. New Fairfield, CT 06812, (203) 943-2044

Connecticut taxpayer and resident for 30 years, and the single parent and Guardian of Megan Weth, a beautiful young adult with Autism.

This story is about my daughter Megan. She is a beautiful, 27 year old woman who happens to have Autism. Megan goes to a day program at Ability Beyond in Bethel, CT and this program is tremendous. It gives Megan activities and learning opportunities Monday through Friday, and I have no idea what I would do without this program. This all relates to the proposed cuts to the DDS budget and how reducing funding to AB (Ability Beyond) directly affects my child.

I lost my wife tragically 8 years ago. She was the center of our world (my son Nick now 29, my daughter Megan and myself) and like many Moms she was so involved with everyone and she made everything happen. She knew everything about Megan, autism, DDS, strategies for improving Megan's life. I was very fortunate to have such a good wife for so long. Back then I could simply concentrate on making a living and she took care of everything else. She went out for a run one Saturday morning and she never made it home. She had hereditary high cholesterol and that morning during her run the main artery to her heart was totally occluded and she had a heart attack and we lost her.

As a single father I struggled to keep my family together and of course just did the best I could.

I educated myself as it related to the Social Services system in Connecticut and I can't believe what a poor job Connecticut does in taking care of our special needs population. I have been trying to gain placement for my daughter in a Group Home for the past seven years with no success. My daughter is Priority 1 status, which sounds very impressive, however it is a step below "Emergency status". Now my daughter requires 24/7 supervision and I have been told by my DDS case worker that the only way Megan will be placed in a Group Home is if I die. I prefer to live and improve the quality of Megan's life by getting her in to a group home. After seven years of trying and despite being eternally optimistic I have lost all hope of this happening in Connecticut.

We were fortunate to win some In-home assistance 22 months ago after winning an arbitration case with the state. I have some assistance to provide caregivers for Megan during the week but I continue to try to get additional services for her on the weekends. I just attended a PAR hearing in Waterbury attempting to do this but I am less than enthusiastic about a positive outcome.

The proposed cuts to DDS are another example of our special needs children paying the price for our our current budgetary situation in Connecticut. Why are the most vulnerable people targeted for cuts in the budget? Why don't we as a state make taking care of our children more of a priority?

I have learned through research that there are states with more compassion for their children then Connecticut. Do I have to follow General Electric's lead and leave the state in order to take care of my child? It certainly appears that way to me. As a citizen I am disgusted at our priorities.

Please do the right thing DO NOT cut funding to DDS. What's more important than our kids?