

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 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 than 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?

February 16,2016

I am Cathy Bronson from Roxbury, Ct. Our son Christopher is 33 years old. Last April he moved into a group home in Danbury with 5 other guys. We have been working on this for nearly a decade.

Chris had a terrible stroke at birth. He is visually impaired, has cerebral palsy, seizure disorder and has mental retardation. But that isn't who he is... He grew up on our family fruit and vegetable farm. When he comes from his group home for the day on the farm, he loves to make apple pies, work in the greenhouse and welcomes customers at our farm market while he polishes apples.

I believe our community is at its best when we are embracing all in our community!

Chris has needed help to get dressed, putting on support socks, leg braces, getting on and off a toilet and managing all his medicines. He requires a person holding on to him if he is standing , walking or showering for safety. Chris has decreased sensation in the lower half of his body, making his balance challenging. He has managed incredible rehabs after 6 back surgeries. One time making him a quadriplegic until he worked hard coming back being able to walk with a walker and a person to steady him. He has always kept the doctors, therapists and even store clerks entertained with new jokes.

You have a difficult job wrestling with budget problems. I ask you to remember that Chris' needs and others with disabilities don't stop needing support because of budgets. Please help them get what they need. Thank you for your work.

Cathy and Howie Bronson, 53 Church St., Roxbury, CT 06783 203-770-1700

Peter & Laurie Bachmann

88 Cains Hill Road

Ridgefield CT 06877

Re: Maya Julie Bachmann DOB 7.17.1989

Necessary Funded Services

Dear Mr. Frey or To Whom it May Concern,

Having watched the state of our CT economy and hearing about the proposed budget cuts to Disability Services, WE ARE VERY CONCERNED. We attended a meeting with Ability Beyond last night --the agency that serves our 26 year old daughter, Maya--and learned about massive further proposed budget cuts to the budget that, in enacted, will directly impact persons with disabilities including Maya. This is unacceptable.

Our daughter Maya is intellectually disabled. She lives at home with us. She attends the Atlas Program (job training) at Ability Beyond. Maya has been on the DDS housing waiting list for more than 5 years.

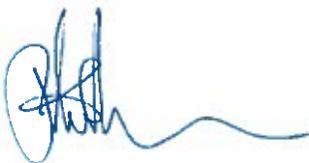
That said, at 26 years old Maya needs housing that she can call her own, NOW. Each of us have this right. Maya cannot live by herself due to her limited intellectual capacity but she does indeed have the right to housing and learning to live independently. IT IS IMPERITIVE that Maya be supported by the State NOW in a living situation independent from her parents. She needs to learn how to live independently before we are no longer able to provide that support or worse, when we are no longer alive. The only way this will happen if housing dollars are made available NOW.

I had a total hip replacement surgery in the fall of 2015 and my wife had a total knee replacement surgery in the spring of 2015. We are not getting younger and Maya needs support now.

We understand that the State pays \$365,000 per person per year at the Southbury Training Center. This number is unbelievable. Allowing our kids the opportunity to find living situations that are more independent would likely cult these costs including other services by 2/3.

We need your voice (and our voice to be heard) in our State government to not cut these funds for the sake of our most vulnerable children. Please vote no to these budget cuts.

Thank you.



Peter & Laurie Bachmann

Ellen and Bruno Luongo
40 Division Street Unit #4
Danbury, CT 06810
(203) 300-5856

Re: Appropriations Hearing
2/18/16

Dear Appropriations Committee,

From: Ellen Luongo

[\[benil1975@yahoo.com\]](mailto:benil1975@yahoo.com)

Our son Johnny Luongo gets services from Ability for about 8 years. He is 31 years old. Without them and their help we don't know where we would have been, or what would have happened to Johnny. I actually think he would have gotten worse. They have helped in so many ways. Many of them in ways we wouldn't have known what to do. Their guidance has been so crucial to Johnny's development. It has also helped for him to know he is not the only one like himself with what he thought he was and that made him more depressed. Besides being mentally challenged Johnny has many health issues.

Last year Johnny moved into supported living. This was a blessing to Johnny as well as us. My husband was the primary care taker because I still work. But he is 74 years old and a challenge to all of us. This brought us peace of mind. What would happen to Johnny if something happened to us? Now needing more care than he did before he has moved. We are so happy and blessed that Ability Beyond can help us and Johnny.

Don't let the governor's budget cuts hurt the people's health and wellbeing. They need housing and services desperately. These cuts will hurt our neediest citizens for which they receive are life sustaining. Without services they have no place to meet their needs. They will end up in hospitals like Johnny did before he had services. The hospitals don't want them either. They told us they weren't a babysitter when he was suicidal.

Bruno and Ellen Luongo

(203) 300-5856

Cc Alice.Meenan@abilitybeyond.org

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee: 2/18/16

H.B. No. 5044: An Act Making Adjustments To State Expenditures For The Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

Submitted by: Jill Chaus – Parent

429 Candlewood Lake Rd N

New Milford, CT 06776

(203) 313 – 1480

To The Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to express the importance of the funding that supports our citizens with disabilities.



I am a mother of a 24 year old young man, named Aitan Harpaz. Aitan is a humorous, charming, sensitive, helpful young man. Aitan is also a loving big brother, a patient and kind cousin, a cherished grandson and a loyal friend. Aitan is an athlete who skis with Special Olympics. He rides horses with Pegasus, a therapeutic riding class. He works part time at two different restaurants, and one supermarket, besides volunteering to read to a kindergarten class once a week, where he shares his favorite childhood books.

As you can see, Aitan is happy and pictured in the middle of me and his brother.

Aitan has been diagnosed with ID, Autism, Schizophrenia, Tourette's and Sensory Integration Disorder.

However, with the support of residential and vocational services from Ability Beyond, Aitan has been able to move out of my home, live in his own apartment and blossom into the productive, young man that he is today. Staff from Ability Beyond help Aitan organize himself, create a routine, teach him to cook, clean, and take care of himself. They provide transportation for him to work, to doctor appointments, the supermarket and social outings. Ability Beyond has taught him about managing his finances, and taking his medication.

With the support Aitan has gotten, it has given him the confidence and skills he needed to live his life proudly and independently to the best of his ability.

Aitan is not only is TAKING financial support in the form of services, he is also GIVING back to his community. He is teaching people tolerance, by being a living example that he can enrich the lives of others. People that meet him are better for having known him.

Aitan has a sense of pride because he feels productive, which is what we all need to feel. Without financial support for the services he receives, my fear is that he would not be able to work, to volunteer, to continue to learn the skills necessary to care for himself. Although I am his mother, there are certain things he cannot get from me. It has taken a village to raise him for which I am thankful. I am able to be his mother, not his caretaker, because his daily care is something he manages without my direct support.

Please continue to find the value in supporting our citizens with disabilities live independent lives, by supporting them with the funding needed for their services. What they give back can be immeasurable.

Thank you for your attention, and please do contact me if needed.

Jill Chaus

February 17, 2016

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Unfortunately, I am not able to make the budget hearing in person, but I did want you to know how important this issue is to me and my family.

When our son Ryan was born, in Trumbull, CT almost 28 years ago, we had no idea that we would become one the millions of families living with autism and Ryan would be one of the tens of thousands served here in CT.

At that time in 1988, little was known of the disorder and the guidance and support that we so urgently needed was very hard to find. Much of it we had to learn ourselves, researching at the library, meeting with other families and struggling to find knowledgeable professionals, as the internet was in its infancy at that time.

Through much perseverance and determination, we learned a great deal about autism and became strong advocates for our son as he traversed through the public school years. Raising a child with autism is often exhausting, expensive and isolating. But we struggled on, optimistic that our hard work and sacrifices would ultimately help our son.

Today, Ryan is currently living in a CRS in Georgetown, CT and attending a vocational program- both supported by DDS and Ability Beyond. He is making great progress as he learns to become as independent as possible. And our family united in supporting Ryan as he moves through early adulthood.

As we understand Governor Malloy's planned cuts, this decreased funding would be extremely detrimental to Ryan and those similar that so desperately depend on DDS support to bring quality and meaning to their lives in addition to that quest for independence.

It is with great distress that we view Governor Malloy's current budget proposal for 2016 to 2017. We view the Governor's cuts to DDS as unfairly targeting and discriminating those with disabilities and demand that no cuts to DDS be implemented. We insist that the legislature reinstate the DDS budget for 2016- 2017 and look to other areas for budget restitution.

We continue to be strong advocates for Ryan and many other families struggling with autism. We know you take the welfare of our families seriously and appreciate your support in the past. We will continue to fight this battle on our son's behalf and for the millions of other families living with family members with autism and intellectual disabilities.

Sincerely,
Maggie Coudriet Siegel
70 Bunker Hill Drive
Trumbull, CT
203-261-3211
Coudie@aol.com

Janet M. Gerlach
15 Edgewood St.
Danbury, CT 06810

Re: Funding for our special needs adults-
Appropriations Hearing
2/18/16

Dear Appropriations Committee,

When my son, Matthew Gerlach, was 16 in 1986, he was bicycling with his Boy Scout Troop on the bicycle trail on Cape Cod. The trail crossed a road and Matt and a car hit. Matt had broken bones and a traumatic Brain Injury. It was 4 months before we could bring Matt back to Connecticut. Matt had to relearn everything, it took him 7 years to be able to swallow water. Matt still does not have short term memory and spend most of the day in a wheel chair.

I was widowed in 1994 and Matt required a lot more care than I could give him. I was blessed when Matt moved into group home run by Dahtar now know as Ability Beyond. He has a good life in his group and goes to a day program at Ability Beyond. Matt and I get together each week and play games and do puzzles. Without a group home our life would have been totally isolated from others, seeing only aides and therapist. Matt and I are very blessed to have Matt in a Group Home. Matt is now 45 and I am 70.

Please help improve funding for Group Homes and Programs for our loved ones that cannot proved for themselves. Matt is not capable of asking for his care to continue, so I am pleading for him.

Thank you for all the work you do on our behalf.
Sincerely Matt's Mom
Janet M. Gerlach
Danbury, CT

Cc Alice.Meenan@abilitybeyond.org
CC: Representative Stephen Harding

Rosemary O'Malley RN and Edward O'Malley CPA

7 Marc Road

Danbury, CT 06810

February 17, 2016

Members of the Appropriations Committee

State of Connecticut Legislature

Dear Committee members:

Last night we attended a sobering meeting at Ability Beyond's offices in Bethel, Connecticut. We were there to support our daughter Maura who has Down's Syndrome and is a resident within the Ability Beyond organization. We oppose the Governor's fiscal year 2017 budget that proposes substantial funding cuts that will endanger the health and well-being of Maura.

There are many reasons we can offer and here are a few of the more important ones. Between Ability and us, Maura receives the best care and love she needs to carry on her life. Maura is not asking for anything else but she is aware of the importance of her family and Ability's efforts to care for her. Ability has done a wonderful job over the eight years Maura has been a resident. We support her and Ability as well, knowing the importance of daily hard work to maintain her well-being and happiness. Let us emphasize that Maura does not live above the financial and social means that you or we are used to, however she is happy and has a modest standard of living.

We understand that disproportional cuts in funding are proposed to fall on nonprofit organizations such as Ability. **How can such a proposal even be thought of?** We can attest to the many difficulties and efforts that all of us have expended during Maura's life but all were worthwhile. She is an exemplary citizen of Connecticut and a positive example to everyone.

We include you in this responsibility to aid Maura and beseech you to consider increasing the funding for Ability Beyond and other worthy non-profit agencies in Connecticut, certainly NOT to reduce your support.

Respectively submitted electronically,

Rosemary and Ed O'Malley

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:

H.B. No. 5044: An Act Making Adjustments To State Expenditures For The Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

Submitted By: Elena M. DePalma

February 18, 2016

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

I would like to share my concerns with House Bill 5044: An Act Making Adjustments To State Expenditures For The Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.

My name is Elena DePalma and I am the guardian for my brother, James Otoshavett, a 56 year old individual with Down Syndrome, who is a client with Ability Beyond, currently receiving residential, health and other related services from that organization. My brother has been a client in the Connecticut social services system for most of his life. Cuts to agencies such as the Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) would be catastrophic to the functioning of organizations such as Ability Beyond and others that provide support to my brother and others like him.

I implore you to reconsider making the proposed cuts to the budget that would impact the services delivered to these, the most helpless and vulnerable of our citizens.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

Elena M. DePalma
8 Queach Road
North Branford, CT 06471
201-815-5829
elena.depalma@yale.edu

cc: Alice Meenan, Ability Beyond
cc: Vincent J. Candeloro, State Representative, District 086
cc: Ted Kennedy, State Senator, District 512

We are writing to describe the need of our most disadvantaged citizens, the mentally ill. Our son John was diagnosed with schizophrenia in his early twenties. For the next ten years our family went through hell. I will relate three instances.

Early in his illness he disappeared. He went to find the lord. We did not know where he went, except he reappeared one day 25 pounds lighter. Later on when visiting Danbury hospital for a checkup he heard voices telling him to jump from the parking garage. Fortunately he did not kill himself as he only broke his ankle. At another time, he told us he was going out for cigarettes and never came back. At midnight we got a call from the local police that John was in his car in a field with the headlights on and the radio blaring. He hasn't driven in twenty years.

These events took its toll on the entire family including his brother and sister and us. We were saved for two reasons : medication which worked and the case management of Ability/Interlude. They have enabled John to live a reasonably normal life in the community saving the state substantial amount of money. During the first ten years John had numerous episodes and therefor admittances to both Fairfield hills state mental hospital and six south at Danbury Hospital. This is intended to be a tribute to the work of all the nonprofits that take care of the mentally ill community.

Jack and Joan Nickerson.

14 Sweet Meadow Dr.

Newtown Ct

cc: M. Bolinsky 106th District

February 17, 2016

Testimony re: Proposed Budget Impacting Health and Human Services

Dear Governor Malloy and The Appropriations Committee.

This is a plea to the governor of Connecticut to curtail any proposed budget that further threatens the health and well-being of those Connecticut residents who are developmentally and intellectually disabled. Of all groups these are the people that are the neediest of the needy. They have little capability for managing themselves physically, mentally, and socially without support. Our son falls into this category. Bobby, thankfully now is part of the Ability Beyond organization. He is now 31 years old and when he was born he was diagnosed Trisomy 8 Mosaic (a chromosome disorder that combines normal and abnormal cells). Throughout his life at home he has had many many surgeries. Those surgeries included such areas as neurological, kidney, hips, legs, and bowel, to name a few. Consequently Bobby is nonverbal, non-mobile without assistance, and developmentally challenged. Yet he remains a bright, intuitive, and loving young man. It would be impossible for him to live on his own. He is the type of young man that could not survive without the kind of services that an organization like Ability Beyond so capably provides. Bobby clearly is representative of most of the consumers that Ability Beyond cares for. The particular home that Bobby requires inside the Ability group is an ICF (intermediate care facility) which means nursing services are necessary for his care. He requires intermittent catheterization at least three times daily plus his medications.

Additional spending cuts will definitely impact the quality and delivery of human services for people like Bobby. The proposed budget takes direct aim toward the most vulnerable people who do not have the individual ability to improve their situation. They are 100% dependent. Substantial cuts have already been made. Connecticut's community of nonprofits deliver the States core services and continue to be forced to operate underfunded. Funding for these absolutely necessary services has been decimated. Fundamentally, it should be nonnegotiable when it comes to budgets that we must take care of our disabled population.

Historically, Connecticut always proved that it supported the needs of people like Bobby. We ask on his behalf and on the behalf of all people like Bobby to please continue to support those organizations that are directly responsible for his well-being. We're lost without them.

Thank you for your anticipated support.

Bob and Deb Jones
57 Lawrence Rd.
Fairfield, CT 06824
203-256-0936