

Adrienne Benjamin <aadriennebb@gmail.com>  
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AppTestimony  
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Testimony on DDS Funding Cuts

Statement to the Appropriations Committee. February 18th, 2016

My name is Adrienne Benjamin, and I really appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about my family and the DDS budget. I live in New Britain with my husband and our 19 year old daughter. I serve as Chair of the Council on Developmental Services. This statement is my own and not from the Council.

I've included a picture of my daughter, (as you can see, she's adorable), plus I brought her favorite toy to give you a sense of what she's like. It's a musical 'puppy' that plays her favorite song, "Head Shoulders Knees and Toes". In other words, developmentally, Zoe's still a toddler in a 19 year old body. And like all toddlers, she can be a delight, or have terrible terrible temper tantrums. She has never spoken a word, and is not able to take care of her personal hygiene. I don't want to go into detail, but, we have to take care of her from head to toe.

Currently, she goes to a great school, which challenges her and helps her quite a bit. Unfortunately, when she turns 21, school will end. That's June of next year.

She will need a Day Program along with DDS funding. As you know, there have been cuts to Day Programs. And, now, the promise of more cuts...and there's already a waiting list.

Please restore the funds to the Day programs...these are essential programs for hundreds of graduates who will need them this June and next.

I also want to emphasize the crucial role the DDS respite program plays in our lives. Zoe has been going to the Newington Respite Center four times a year. These are long weekends where she stays with 5-6 other kids in a homey environment with DDS staff. It's amazing to have a true break from caregiving. We know she's safe and being cared for by fantastic DDS employees. Last year about 900 people utilized respite services, and believe me, we all really depend on it. Please, please, protect this wonderful program.

Lastly, I'm aware that there are fundamental changes being proposed for DDS. After listening to Secretary Barnes and Commissioner Murray, it seems clear that there are serious efforts being made to expand services to finally address the crisis of the longstanding residential waiting list. All the attention from the I/DD caucus, the Appropriations and Public Health Committees as well as the Governors office is a great development. But, I ask, how can there be true progress with 50 million dollars in cuts? Please, no more cuts to DDS funds. Please restore the funding.

