

My name is Julie Swanson and I reside in Durham, Connecticut. I want to thank Committee chairs Senator Gerratana and Representative Ritter for raising H.B. 5128.

My 21 year old son is graduating this year. He has an intellectual and developmental disability. My school district has spent more than one million dollars educating him to have skills so he could have a meaningful, productive life. He is among many other families in Connecticut who are trying to build meaningful lives for our adult family members living with a disability. He is ready to go out into the world just like the rest of us. Without the funding to support him, he will stay home and his skills with atrophy. The money that my school district invested in him will be flushed down the drain.

In addition to being a parent, I am a special education advocate and a member of the Connecticut Transition Task Force. In other words, I live, eat, sleep and breath working with families helping them secure an appropriate education for their children so they can have the skills they require for adulthood. Preparing students for adulthood is among the purpose of the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). It is shameful that we invest so much (including money) in preparing our children for adulthood and our State is not supporting our family members so the investment can carry over to adulthood.

I want to assure you that our families DO NOT want babysitting for our adults. We want our family members to use the skills they acquired in school, to get up everyday with a purpose. Our family members want to work and participate in the community. Most importantly, they want to CONTRIBUTE.

I support H.B. 5128 because it will help our son and other Connecticut citizens with I/DD by sustaining the positive changes at DDS being achieved through institutional consolidation and group home conversions by allowing the budget savings to remain in the DDS system and be applied to the system's unmet needs, notably the Waiting Lists for Residential and Day/Vocational Services. If budget savings and lapses are not applied to unmet needs, DDS will remain a poorly performing agency with respect to those it is mandated to serve and the inequity and Waiting Lists will grow.

We also request that the Committee raise the comprehensive "DDS Family's Rights Bill" proposed by Representative Demicco. This bill will increase transparency in communication between DDS and the families and individuals that it serves.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of all the citizens and taxpayers of Connecticut.

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