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Appropriations Committee Hearing - February 18, 2016
Oppose House Bill No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE
EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017

Good afternoon, Senator Bye and Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am here to testify against House Bill No. 5044.

My name is Joseph Gannon and I have worked for the Department of Developmental Services for more than 29 years. For the last 18 years I have worked in the Respite program. Respite is a program which allows individuals with special needs a couple of chances a year to get away from their daily routines and see friends or make new friends. Respite also gives many families a short break from their daily routine which in some cases means 16-24 hour line of sight or arms-length supervision.

Over the years of working in Respite I have had the opportunity to talk with many parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, or grandparents of these individuals. What I have heard from many of these family members is "We are thankful for this break, but we need more." Not in a greedy way but in a concerned way. Many of these families are stretched beyond what they can handle and have reached a crisis point.

Many of these families are looking for placement for their loved one. Not because they don't love them but because they have hit this critical point. Many of the families have said they have looked for placement only to be told "nothing is available." Often these families ask us as workers what they can do. On many occasions, these families talk about other families they know who are without services completely.

We see a number of group homes or other living arrangements slated to close this year and there are another 30 for next year. We often hear the word "privatization" thrown around. But that is not what we are truly looking at here. Each time "privatization" has occurred in the past there has appeared to be a net loss in placement opportunities for those who are waiting for these services. I don't see just "privatization"-- I see elimination of services. This would appear to be the absolutely wrong course of action when so many individuals with special needs and their families are in crisis.

I hope you will take a close look at this situation. Thank you for your time and attention.