

Public Health Committee Testimony on Bill No. HB 5128
Marina Derman, Westport

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and members of the Public Health Committee. I want to thank you for raising this vital bill, and taking the time to listen to us. **I am here today to support House Bill 5128.**

My husband and I have two young adult sons with autism and intellectual disabilities. Over the past several years, I have testified several times regarding DDS funding, all the time watching DDS fall further and further behind. First we talked about a \$30 million cut, then \$50 million since 2012, then \$60 million . . . and now we are looking at a very challenging biennial budget coming up next year.

In this bill, you have the chance to give DDS some protections that it vitally needs. By ensuring that any savings achieved by this agency stay within its budget, you can support the agency in fulfilling its mission, which is to serve vulnerable citizens like my sons.

As you know, currently any unused funds are swept up and restored to the General Fund. These unused funds could be created in different ways. First, savings appear, as they did this year, when the agency is directed to curtail its spending – and in doing so leaves lapsed funds unused. Second, efforts have been made this year to manage and reduce the massive amount of overtime in DDS. Finally, as you also know, the recent Legislative Special Session directed Commissioner Murray to develop a plan for Southbury Training School and the regional centers. From any of these three sources I've mentioned, instead of using any savings or recovered funds to serve the population for which it was intended, the disabled community, it is taken for other purposes. This is essentially a penalty to DDS – creating a situation where any cost savings achieved by operating improvements will immediately be whisked away.

At this time, when there are 2,000 people on the Residential Waiting List, this give-away is unconscionable. It is punishing our families, who wait year after year for services only to be told that they must wait still longer. Last year when I testified, we worried primarily about that Residential waiting list – where families are being told that their loved ones cannot receive a residential placement until their caregivers' deaths. But as we speak today there is now also a waiting list for day services, a waiting list for entrance to BSP, the Behavioral Services Program (formerly VSP, Voluntary Support Program), a major decrease in respite programs, and a planned delay in funding for this year's new graduates. The situation for our children (both young and adult), and the stress on our families, is dire, and getting worse.

We families realize that the economic situation in our state is challenging. However, it is the job of the legislature to be a part of setting priorities for the funds that we do have. I am asking you to make the choice to make our intellectually disabled population a priority. I implore you to protect what money DDS has now, and to allow any efficiencies, savings, and improvements to be kept within the agency to help the large and growing population that it serves. Do not let funds that are desperately needed for our loved ones, whose disabilities leave them no other options to take care of themselves, be taken away and used elsewhere.