

Lauralyn Lewis
Old Lyme, CT
March 7, 2017

SB246 AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE-WIDE WAITING LIST FOR RESIDENTIAL
PLACEMENT FOR PERSONS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

I speak to you today as an advocate for individuals who have intellectual disabilities and as a parent whose son is a client and consumer of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). I am all too familiar with the concerns of the DDS residential waiting list families as my son was one of the approximately two thousand individuals on the residential waiting list. Had it not been for a medical emergency, a cancer diagnosis, my son would not be living an independent life with supports at this time. I was fortunate that DDS was familiar with my son's needs, but there is not good information on the needs of most of the waiting list families. We were unaware of this until money was appropriated for approximately one hundred waiting list families two years ago. At that time, DDS had to reach out to eligible families (ages seventy years and older) in order to collect that information.

Last year families brought this concern to your attention through Senate Bill 294. This bill passed unanimously out of the Public Health Committee and the Human Services Committee with strong bipartisan support and one third of the legislature co-sponsoring it. This was due to the conversations my fellow families and I have had with many of you here in the legislature. It was not included in the final bill that we worked to draft with Senator Gerratana, Senator Fasano and DDS, as families agreed to work with the DDS in an attempt to avoid legislation. We thank you, Senator Gerratana, for speaking eloquently to this point in the senate on April 30, 2016.

Members of Families First met with DDS for six months and worked to draft an acceptable mechanism to capture this information through the natural process of the already existing and required annual review that DDS conducts with their clients and families. It is important to note that the news of Commissioner Morna Murray resigning was the impetus to bring us back to the original agreement that we would be provided this bill if we felt it was needed. It is needed. The never ending changes in staff at DDS and budget cuts, leaves this already vulnerable population with few safeguards. We seek to put forth what we hope will be thought of as a building block – to formalize this through legislation so that going forward, it will be required regardless of who is commissioner of DDS and what ideology they possess.

This bill will not require a fiscal note, any additional time by staff, but it will provide the Appropriations Committee with accurate information annually for planning purposes. We thank Senator Osten in her role as Chair of Appropriations for following through on this bill, Senator Fasano for recognizing the importance of this bill and honoring his commitment to families and for all of you who once again have the opportunity to show what the bipartisan effort can achieve. Additionally, I would like to thank the already twenty-two legislators who have added their names as co-sponsors including Republican co-chair of Appropriations, Senator Formica.

I respectfully ask that this concept be passed and that the bill be amended to include the more appropriate language currently written for SB 244. It is my understanding from Senator Fasano's office that SB 244 would be the bill for the ID partnership. I offer my apologies to this committee for any confusion and to the number of families who may be speaking out against this bill for not understanding the amount of work that has gone into this and the reason for doing so.

The lives of the intellectually and developmentally disabled are being determined by the decisions made here. A few of your former colleagues, supporters of our families are no longer here to see this through, but you can and I hope you will.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauralyn Lewis