

Thank you for giving us an opportunity to express our views on critical bills in front of you this week. As the parents of a young man with Down Syndrome who will turn 24 this June, these and many other issues have an immense impact on our lives.

Dan and I moved our family to Putnam when Evan was 5. He entered the public school system and I thought we were in good hands. We were assigned a DDS case manager who turned out to be as uninvolved as a human could be, calling only once per year. He took early retirement because of budget cuts and no one was reassigned because of budget cuts.

Eventually I had to leave my career (and almost half our income) for a number of reasons. First and foremost, small towns in rural America don't get a fair shake on funding any programs nevermind consideration for the I/DD community. There was no after school/vacation care, no summer school, and frankly, any employer has difficulty excusing this much time off.

I became Evan's only advocate learning as much as I could about what state and federal law requires. By thinking outside the box I created opportunities for Evan in the community and fought with the school to enhance his experience there. All of my proposals were easy, cheap/free and common sense or required by law but took forever to implement.

We are now in our 60's and Evan's need to become a more independent adult have surpassed my area of expertise and creativity. He has wanted a job for a long time, wants to live outside our home, and have friends and a social life. Our physical and financial ability to provide for Evan are coming to an end faster than I'd like to admit.

We are asking you to support SB 296 before Evan's life is "crisis" level. A pilot program to encourage providers to offer expanded living options for those who, with support can continue to grow and give back to their community is long overdue.

Please support SB 400. Provide graduate funding and services for the I/DD community so that we do not have a population of shut-ins with no opportunity to achieve their full potential. Embrace the efforts of the Not for Profit agencies that have proven over and over again they have the true desire and expertise to provide individualized and group plans in a more cost effective manner than state agencies/institutions. Give these employees the chance to earn a living wage and create a training and development committee to ensure recognition they so justly deserve.

Do Not Support SB 463. This is not a solution to the waiting list crisis! Budget analysis of institutions such as Southbury Training School provided enough shock for my lifetime. Overtime expenses that cannot be justified and operation of a full time Fire Department that is obsolete are proof that any kind of state run entity is not wise use of tax payers money. For profit nursing homes/institutions are not deserving of public funding.

Sincerely,
Lisa and Dan Hennessey
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