To the members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jeannette Brodeur of Terryville, CT. I was born and raised in Waterbury, Connecticut, moved to Pennsylvania and New Jersey and I chose to come back here to the Nutmeg State to raise my family. One of the biggest reasons I chose to return was because of the special needs services offered here.

I am the 51-year-old mother three children including a 19-year-old son, Aaron Schein, with intellectual/developmental disabilities and autism as well as another 23-year-old son, Harley Schein, with high-functioning autism. Our daughter Jillian Schein, is the youngest and faces the stress of navigating how to manage the care for her siblings when my husband and I die.

I know that our state is facing an enormous deficit and you all may feel the DDS budget needs cuts, but my family begs you make no cuts in this area.

Our family has needed crisis intervention and behavioral supports for our oldest son Harley when he was severely bullied in middle school and threatened to kill himself. He spent several weeks at a time in the emergency room and psychiatric unit during a very difficult four-month period of his life, but finally after fighting to receive behavioral services specifically targeted to his needs, he was able to attend a special needs school, the FOCUS Center for Autism, go to a special needs high school, graduate from high school and now has a college degree and is working. I shudder to think where he would be today without special services.

Our 19-year-old son, Aaron, was in the birth to three program in New Jersey and has received special services since we moved to Connecticut in 2005. Aaron has graduated high school and is currently in the LARC transition program in Torrington. It is crucial that there are services for him to live as independently as possible. He will need some sort of
supportive housing setting. He cannot cook without supervision and would not know what to do in the event of a fire or something unexpected happening. Aaron cannot drive and is learning to take the bus at his transition program and starting to make friends through the LARC social programs.

When our children were younger, there were no respite centers available for our family, but now, I would welcome such a program, not just for our family, but for all of the parents and families throughout the state who just need a moment of peace in their chaotic lives.

My biggest fear is that Aaron will have no where to live except with his sister. The road ahead is difficult and long for our family, but we know so many other families who are struggling even more than we have.

Please, I beg of you all to not cut the budget and to put all of these special needs individuals and their families first. They deserve the very best lives they can have.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Kindly,

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