Good Morning Senator Olsten, Representative Walker and Appropriations Committee Members,

My name is Velma Williams-Estes and I live in Meriden, CT. I am a member of the advocacy group - Our Families Can’t Wait. I am also the mother of a fifty-one year old daughter who has Down syndrome and I/DD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.) Deborah has very limited vocabulary and does not read, write or understand how to independently cope with everyday living situations, therefore, she needs assistance in all aspects of her life at all times. Deborah lives at home with me and I’m her only caregiver. Being a widow makes it even more difficult for both of us.

All of the above was our situation until recently. After she turned 50 little things began to happen. After increased and noticeable incidents, she was diagnosed with dementia. Other health issues began to surface causing a lot of sleepless nights. After I’m gone Deborah will still need a home that’s safe, secure and which provides a sense of caring about her needs. This State should be that support but too many families are still in dire need of services. We realize that there is no perfection to our system and this will never happen but we all should feel confident that these situations will be okay in spite of our imperfections. But instead, families are feeling that our leaders do not put the needs of their loved ones with I/DD as an urgent priority.

For too long, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has been deprived of the funding necessary to provide adequate and quality services for ALL of the state’s residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). This special community is being deprived of the opportunity to live their best lives. Our Families Can’t Wait continue to life our voices for extended respite care and livable wages for workers because these two issues (among others) are most important. So I urge you to support and join us in our efforts to protect our loved ones from harsh/demeaning decisions that deprives them of a good life. When decisions are not just to those with I/DD others like caregivers, family members, workers and service providers, are impacted hard. When parent(s) and workers lose their jobs (lower or no income) this effects families which effects the economy. The domino effect continues throughout the state. No one wins here! We ask you to turn the state of Connecticut around to become the leader in dealing with the needs of people with I/DD. Make the people of CT. proud and respectful of you.

Our loved ones are people who matter just like you. They need our help desperately. Please find it within yourselves to do the right thing and never leave people with I/DD out of the most positive decisions you make as you work to deal with our economy. Let this year be the beginning of a positive outcome for the ALL citizens of this state. We will all benefit from your efforts.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate your attention to this most important and critical matter.

Velma Williams-Estes
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