March 1, 2019
Tony Candelaria,
Licensed Practical Nurse, DDS
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Tony Candelaria and I am a Licensed Practiced Nurse in DDS. I have worked in this department for over 30 years. I care for those in our society who through no fault of their own are less fortunate than us, who have either been born with or have somehow acquired developmental disabilities. These individuals are our relatives, brothers, sisters and children. It is tasked to us as a society to care for them and let them know they have value and are not a burden.

Sometimes those of us who have family affected by someone with a disability realize that those who care for them can’t do it forever. We get sick, we get injured or frankly, we just get older. We need help and have to admit it to ourselves which is very hard to do. We then have to reach out and ask others to assist. The State has resources for these families. These resources are invaluable and necessary to those who use them. **They are also not enough.**

At a time when need is growing more and more, funding that should be growing with the need is shrinking. Those that qualify for help get to go on a waiting list, and they wait and wait and wait. The State of Connecticut used to have 180 Group homes under DDS and as the need has grown, we now have 35. That is less than one fifth of what we used to have. We are going backwards.

I can tell any family who has a loved one under our care that we are very sensitive to each individual we care for. We know that if you have Autism you have certain habits that can’t be changed. That’s okay. We know that if you have trouble eating and it takes an hour or two to eat, that’s okay. We understand that if walking takes you longer to get anywhere. That’s okay too! There are many examples of the staff feeling that someone is just not themselves who took the steps to make sure medical care is there for them and many cases saved a life. I am usually a modest man, but I can tell you that the care we give in our homes is excellent. Besides medical care we offer emotional support and we give them a family. People are allowed to make their own decisions and if possible those decisions are honored. For you and me just to go and hop in our car and go to the mall is a simple and mundane task but to our individuals it is a planned outing and greatly appreciated.

At a more personal level, I have a nephew that has Pelizaeus-Merzbacher Disease (PMD). My nephew will never walk. He will never talk other than a few audible sounds. He will always have to be diapered and will always need assistance. His parents, my brother and sister in law are in their 50’s and in relatively good health. There is a lingering question though of what will happen to him if they can no longer care for him. They would like to feel confident that his needs would be taken care of, but with funding cuts, they are nervous. I am here today as not only a caregiver, but as someone who has a family member that needs care, and I am telling you that cutting funding is NOT the way. We need to fully fund these services so that people and families with I/DD have support.

Thank you for your time.