Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Laverne Hatcher. I have been working at Journey Found for four years caring for individuals with intellectual with developmental disabilities. Currently, I work primarily as “in home support” for an individual who is a long term patient at a hospital. I have known this individual for a long time, and he and his mother are like family to me.

When I work with JP, my job is to stimulate him, help him grow, and to give him the best possible quality of life. I challenge him with activities that make him use his fine motor skills, like building legos, blocks, or puzzles. I take him to outside events like drumming class, and help him make gifts for his mother. I even advocate for him at the hospital to make sure he is being respected by his health care providers and that they understand his needs. I love working with him, and he gets a big smile when I walk in the room. Still, I am only funded to spend 35 hours a week with him, and when I’m not there he often just sits with someone who’s only there to watch him. With more funding for our programs, myself or another trained direct care provider could spend a lot more time on these meaningful activities, instead of him just staring at the wall. It would also make it possible for him to go on exciting trips and more enriching experiences. This is so important for an individual whose medical needs prevent him from going out into the community often and deprive him of the same opportunities as everyone else.

Further, more funding makes sure I can continue on in this field and save for my future. I have nothing for retirement, and I often have to find 10, 20, 30 overtime hours just to make ends meet. My daughter, who also works for Journey Found, works seven days a week just to pay her bills. Group Home agencies like Journey Found have a lot of trouble trying to keep staff around because we cannot afford to stay in this industry. I call on you to support greater funding for all DDS services, so that the individuals that we care for can get the care they deserve, and so we can worry more about them and less about paying our bills.

Thank you for your time.