

January 29, 2013

I am writing to you today to voice my concerns over the past and future budget cuts directly affecting individuals with mental health issues. I address this issue not only on behalf of the population I serve every day as a Direct Support Professional, but more importantly, as a parent of a child with Asperger's Syndrome, an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

As a professional, I have seen over the years how budget cuts have affected the population that my agency serves. Community outings have had to be cut, staffing hours for individuals who need more assistance have been cut, and money for programs for the every increasing autism population graduating from our state's schools has been cut. People who need housing may not be able to get it, and those who do may not get the adequate staffing because there isn't enough money in the budget to hire.

As a parent I have known the struggle it has been to get servicing for my son. Almost 21 years old now, he is finishing up his final semester in the Western Connection, a college program for individuals with disabilities. He has finally developed a social circle and become involved, and has learned a little about college, but with only the support through the program. He is a brilliant individual, but doesn't apply himself. He would be happy sitting home playing video games all day long, if allowed. Like any parent, I want my son to be successful, but when he leaves this program, he will still be the same a young man, only without services. He wants to move on to college, but just because he graduates out of the program, does that mean he no longer needs support? Behavioral, social, budgeting, and employment services were all services which he was receiving prior to his 21st birthday, in the program. Where most 21 year olds would be moving forward, he may not. Not to say he doesn't want to, but if he does not continue to receive the services he needs, he may become the kid who won't leave his room, playing video games. I, as his mother, will not allow it, but I need help. Help from you, the

state of Connecticut, the state I have called home my entire life. We need to work together to help individuals like my son. We need to do more for these kids. There is a growing population of individuals with autism graduating out of our schools, and we are lacking in programs for them. With every budget cut, we are asking for trouble. The mental health of our state is at risk, and it is unfortunate that something as horrific as what happened in Sandy Hook had to shed light on this issue. That young man needed help, and it was a tragedy any way you look at it. Don't let our state's most delicate population suffer by cutting the budget where it is money needed most.

I hope you consider my plea.

Sincerely,

Pamela Cappiello Sweeney
Brookfield, CT