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Michelle Gardner, Developmental Services
Supported Living Worker
Supported Living Program
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Michelle Gardner. I am a Developmental Services Supported Living Worker with DDS's Supported Living Program. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Intellectually Disabled individuals that I work with.

I'd like to speak to you today about the Supported Living Program that is under the Department of Developmental Services. This is a wonderful program which was started almost 40 years ago for individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. These individuals came from institutions and group homes, with some also coming from living with their parents. In this program, they have gone from needing 24 hour staff supports to now only needing a few hours per week as dedicated staff have worked together with them to make them as independent as possible so that they can now live on their own. When they entered the Program, they and their families were promised "A lifetime of support". Up until now, that promise has been kept.

I come here today to ask you to consider keeping this promise by continueing to support this Supported Living Program and to allow it to close on its own....organically. I am not here to ask for it to be funded indefinitely.

As our individuals are aging and needing more supports than this program can offer, we are meeting with the individuals, and their case managers to find a more suitable residence for them. We have been finding more and more of these outside Private Provider Residences for our individuals and currently have 5 more that will be transitioning out in the next few months. We also have several of our State employees that have left the program due to Retirement with more scheduled to leave this year.

I recommend that we continue to support these individuals and their parents (most who are now in their 80's) by honoring our commitment we made to them when we took their children into this incredibly successful and wonderfully supported living program. We can do this by allowing the Program to close itself organically through continued State Employee Retirements and also by State Employees continuing to place these Intellectually Disabled Individuals in Private Placements as they age out and begin to need more complex medical care. This is a fragile population. Please don't force them to uproot their lives after 40 years. Please consider how this is impacting their lives. They are currently extremely scared and worried about their future with the possibility of this program not being there for them.

I thank you for your consideration and urge you to continue funding this incredibly beneficial and cost effective program which these wonderful individuals rely on.