
Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns.

We strongly urge you to consider the most vulnerable people who live in our state, and the need for quality services to support them and their families. Over the years DDS has taken a hit on funding and as a result there are shortages of residential placements and Day Programs have not developed in ways that keep up with the times.

Currently there is a huge shortage of residential placements, especially for those needing constant supervision. While we have seen some exciting new programs that are opening up for people who can live with limited supervision or independently, we are concerned that the long term needs of those who need 24/7 supervision are not being addressed or they are expected to somehow adapt to the idea that technology will take the place of people. While we are all for innovative technology as a supplement, we are very concerned that it is being seen as a less expensive substitute. The needs of all should be considered so that everyone is safe.

Our other main concern is that we need to have funds for DDS to allocate toward improving Day Programs. This would include increasing hours for the clients as well as effectively training staff and increasing pay and hours available for those who work with this challenging population. There needs to be meaningful opportunities during the day for those attending Day Programs. It is especially challenging for staff working with those who have more severe challenges, either behaviorally or physically. The staff needs to be supported with consistent and up-to-date training in order to best serve their clients. Some strides have been made but we need to stop thinking it's "good enough." When sheltered workshops were closed, there was not an option any longer for meaningful work for the population who used to enjoy that work. In addition, a six hour Day Program means families need to scramble for care to cover the other hours when they are trying to hold their own jobs, and the employees at the Day Programs often have to work second and third jobs to provide for their own families.

Let's enter a new age of how we care for our most vulnerable citizens and at the same time recognize the value of the employees who choose to do this valuable work. DDS needs to be a priority.

Thank you.
Donna and Harold Cohen
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