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### **Appropriations Testimony for the DDS Budget Hearing**

Because my son Karl has autism, my family and I have been testifying at countless public hearings and advocating all over the state for many years now. I looked over my former testimonies and read over and over again about the huge budget cuts DDS incurred every budget cycle. Private providers had to cut their services and continue to find ways to serve people like Karl with less. We kept hearing from elected officials that when the economy improves DDS would be allotted more funds.

The economy has taken a turn for the better and there have been some improvements for people with IDD and the staff who care for them. We are so grateful that Karl finally received residential funding and rent subsidies from DDS. Now his life in the community is much more secure and the financial burden on my husband and I as retired teachers has lessened. Non-profits received a much needed pay increase for their staff that assist my son. High school graduates with IDD have had day program funding restored so they are able to transition from school to day programs right after they turn 21.

I am here today to thank legislators, senators and the governor for the funding that helped our son and others with IDD in the state. However, this is just a beginning for what needs to be done. This budget needs to restore the resources for a department that had it's funding decimated over the last ten years.

The non-profit rate increase to \$14.76 per hour it is not enough to retain experienced and knowledgeable staff. My son has incredible musical, artistic and athletic abilities as well as some serious behaviors. In public school he had trained special education staff and therapists who knew intimately about behavior intervention and how to de-escalate his behaviors. Now when Karl is lucky enough to have staff with a degree and experience working with his kind of complexities, they usually don't stay long because the pay and benefits are not enough for the difficult work they need to do. When Karl's staff is paid the same wage as fast food employees, it is no wonder that they may not stay long working with my son who may hurt himself when his scheduled changes or when some one cries in the community. Working with Karl can be very rewarding but it is also difficult and requires training, skills and experience that are worth more than \$14.76 per hour.

Underpaid staff also have many transportation problems because they can't afford good cars. If Karl's staff can't see him because their car broke down he can get very upset. Because employee pay is low they often work more than one job, which can

cause scheduling conflicts and extreme fatigue. We now live nearer to Karl so we can provide back up, but when we leave this earth what will happen to him then? Some say assistive technology is the answer. We have two phones, a GPS device and Facetime to keep track of Karl but batteries and devices can fail. Competent and capable staff are always the best way to keep Karl safe.

Another area to consider in terms of funding is how the process of aging effects the IDD population. Although Karl now lives an integrated life in the New Haven community thanks to DDS funding and the support from all the wonderful people at Marrakech, Chapel Haven and Family Care, his behaviors concerning schedule changes and his desire to “stop” children from crying has increased the older he gets. He may need more supports or need to live in a setting where he receives 24/7 care in the future. He is now alone in his apartment at night and for part of the weekend. People with IDD change over time and DDS needs to have the funding necessary to meet those changing needs.

I thank you for all you have done to help people like Karl. I also implore you to restore all the budget cuts DDS has had to endure in the past. We need to treat the most vulnerable in CT better now that our state is experiencing better economic times.

**Karl singing the national anthem at Special Olympics 2019**

