

To The Appropriation Committee Members:

My name is Susan Gardner. My son Mark was diagnosed with Autism at age Two. He has now just turned twenty seven years old and has been in a Shared Living home with 2 other young men staffed by Marrakech for the past five years.

The responsibility of a family is to make sure that each child has the tools in place to live an independent life, no matter what disabilities they have before their parents are gone. Our Marrekech staff / team for Mark at his house not only takes care of his daily living needs, health, nutrition and safety but they also help him thrive in the community and personally and live a happy fulfilling life. Our family stays very involved with Mark and the house staff. We are all his team. Together we strive each day for that goal. With Mark's many aggressive behavioral needs and learning disabilities the staff needs to be trained and retrained as issues come up. InConsistency with staff and routine can effect Mark greatly. Changes in this often result in self injurious behaviors and physical harm to others. A quality cohesive team is imperative for our Shared Living house.

I am pleading with the committee to recognize that the staff are essential workers with a skill set that far goes beyond an entry level pay scale. Agencies need to be able to increase their rates, pay for medical benefits, other benefits and incentives for employees to see themselves in a career that they can maintain long term. Too often staff leave to find a job that can pay them more. I understand their financial dilemma but this turnover is so difficult for our son with disabilities.

I respectfully request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community non profits. These valued employees deserve to be recognized for all their hard work, skill, compassion and love they give to this population.

Thank you for your time and your service.

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