

Darla Chafin  
Augusta  
LD 258

Chairwoman Rotundo, Chairwoman Sachs, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee in Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Chairman Baldacci, Chairwoman Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is Darla Stimpson Chafin and I live in Augusta. I am testifying neither for nor against this biennial budget. I do have a concern about the need for more investment in the care of people with cognitive disabilities and in the training and value of those working with them.

My daughter is a former Pineland resident now living in a waiver group home. It took a long time, but she now has a home where she feels safe and useful and is very proud to believe that she can give her opinion (even without formal language) about her home and her activities. Even though she lost all but one of her staff during COVID, the replacements obviously were trained about her limitations as well as her ways. As a result, she has improved in her use of the guard rails in the house and realizes that I may need more help as well these days. She says nothing, but she is aware and helps in the limited way she can. Most importantly, she trusts them, not only in the way they treat her but also her roommates and those they meet. It is refreshing and also healthy for her. Frankly, it is the way people should live and learn. But it does cost in enlightened training and dedicated staff who earn enough so they don't have to find a second job. My daughter who has scarred lungs and is prone to upper respiratory diseases and choking has been watched closely enough to not have to be hospitalized with pneumonia or COVID since this placement. Or even for head injuries caused by her poor sense of balance. It was all caught early enough and treated competently enough that she could stay either at home or with staff she knew and away from vulnerable clients who might be exposed to any illness.

Assistance and supports whether given in a residential placement, with their family or at their own home allows amazing progress for all involved. Waitlists for these people do cost lives and degraded health, if not theirs then their families. It is time we corrected this situation. I think the economic changes that would result in their lives, in the health and careers of their families, and in the families of those who receive the training and well-earned respect for their dedication and support as Direct Support Professionals, Case Managers and administrators that continue to pinch a penny to stretch their budgets as far as possible, knowing the great needs still waiting to be addressed.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. And thank you for your continued open mindedness in the struggle to understand and address the needs of those who are easily overlooked.

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