LD 744 4/12/23 Catherine Honeycomb on behalf of Megan Tucker

In 1988, I delivered two healthy identical twin babies. They were beautiful, and as they grew, they hit all their physical milestones. But their acquisition of language and social skills lagged. I sought opinions from pediatricians, speech therapists, occupational therapists, you name it. No one wanted to give an actual *diagnosis*, they just identified "developmental delays", and kept saying it was common with twins. Two years later, I took them to see Dr Isabel Rapin at Albert Einstein Medical Center in New York, where we were given a diagnosis of autism and a Kleenex. And that was it.

Since that day, my primary responsibility has been keeping these two now grown women connected; to their family, their peers, their community. Caity currently lives in a privately managed residence for adults with mild disabilities in South Portland. Megan's needs are far broader. She has an extensive vocabulary, but struggles to form a sentence. She has learned to ride a horse and a bike, to ski, swim, skate. She's a great traveler and we went everywhere as a family. But she has not been able to generalize these skills into other environments.

Meg's transition to residential placement was preceded by 7 months at Spring Harbor Hospital, after endangering her own life and mine. She now resides in a Woodfords Family Services residence in Scarborough, with two housemates who also struggle with very challenging behaviors. Woodfords' ability to provide appropriate staff for this house is severely hampered by their inability to hire, train, pay and retain people with the qualities necessary to support these residents, both in their house and in the community. Turnover is a huge issue with residents who cannot communicate effectively. Megan cannot access the community unless she is accompanied by experienced, trained, competent staff. It has been a very long time since someone has fit that description, and so a very long time since Meg has gone into the community with anyone other than me.

Autism, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder rule her life. If there is a loose string on her shirt, she rips the shirt to shreds. If a puzzle piece goes missing, or the DVD case breaks, the result is catastrophic. She resists transitions in any form. She does things to gain access to sweets that would get anyone else arrested. She is banned for life from the Cookie Jar in Cape Elizabeth, has climbed over counters for whoopie pies, and grabbed a handful from the middle of a sheetcake at Hannafords.

When Meg's tolerance is eclipsed by her anxiety, she shrieks as loud as she can, wherever she is. This is followed by panicked behavior, rushing out the door, property destruction and the like. For Megan to be engaged in both her home and community, she must be supported by capable, trained and dedicated staff. THEY DO NOT GROW ON TREES. All the outside professionals in the world, and we've engaged plenty, cannot replace those staff with whom the residents interact 90% of the time. Woodfords needs the resources to identify, hire and train these desperately-needed staff. Please give them a path forward to accomplish this.