

Good Morning

My name is JoAnn Forman and I reside at 110 Griswold Drive, West Hartford with my husband Jeffrey and our 32-year-old daughter Emily.

Emily is a sweet and sensitive young lady

She is a Big UCONN Basketball Fan and a master of music trivia .

She currently works at HARC in their supported employment program, for which we are grateful

IF things continue as they are with DDS, Emily will live with us until we die, and then all that she knows and is familiar with will turn upside down overnight. Something no one should have to endure.

Despite being born with an intellectual disability, Emily's life has been filled with many advantages. The town of West Hartford has supported and served her well, both educationally and socially. That level of support has changed drastically since she turned 21. Emily has had at least 5 different DDS Case Managers in the past 10 years. I have never felt that there was someone who was truly advocating for her. I don't blame the individuals themselves, but they were simply overworked, in some cases clearly burnt out, and had very little to offer, especially in recent years. Emily has been on the "waitlist to no where" for the past 14 years.

If DDS had been honest with it's stakeholders 10 years ago, we would have made different planning decisions, avoiding the mess we are in now, and maybe we could have adequately addressed the residential waiting list. But that was then and here we are now. This 5-year plan is ambitious, and we can't drag our feet any longer. Change needs to happen for ALL of our children.

That being said, I like many aspects of the project-based approach, but here are some of my concerns and questions.

First, The plan talks about increasing employment opportunities for all supported individuals. This is an excellent goal, but I have seen firsthand even with all of HARC's attempts, new job sites and opportunities are not expanding, to the contrary they seem to be diminishing. I see this even with Emily, in Merchandising. Advances in technology have often taken away many of the jobs that were frequently performed by many of our children. Competitive employment might be an option for some, but not all will be able to benefit.

Second, the plan does not address concrete steps on how to reduce the wait list and provide residential supports for individuals seeking such assistance. As the plan states, we need to "develop efficiencies to serve more people" I don't think anyone would argue that this should be

a PRIORITY! We all know that Southbury Training School with fewer than 300 clients receives millions of dollars annually. Similarly, there are hundreds of individuals around the state residing in-group homes and supported living arrangements that receive excessive financial support and then **thousands** of others who receive **nothing at all**. As the plan states, and I agree, we need to be both more EFFICIENT and FAIR with how monies are allocated in our state.

One way to achieve greater efficiency and fairness, is to look creatively at ways to share/pool resources to meet the needs of more individuals. For example, create living arrangements where the resources given to one client can be shared with another individual who may have lesser needs and require fewer hours of residential support. There might also be an opportunity to create shared living arrangements where DDS and families pool resources to serve a larger number of individuals. For example, clients with more substantial needs living on one floor of a multi family house can share staff with clients on another floor who require only minimal support. I am not implying we spread our staff too thin, but to look at what is reasonable and efficient for all. We need to be creative and begin the "think outside the box."

I talk with parents all the time and they are very willing to stay involved and collaborate, as long as DDS does their share. I am not looking for a free handout, and I know that most parents I speak with agree. They are **our children**, we need to take ownership and continue to support them emotionally and financially to the best of our ability, but WE CANNOT do it alone. If budgets are "lean", then the department needs to be considerably more efficient in doing business AND if the budget is too lean to meet the needs of all individuals, then DDS along with it's stakeholders must speak out and fight for more financial support from our government. We have to be a voice for those who can't always speak for themselves.

In Emily's case and for many others, I hope this 5 year plan will better serve her and hopefully provide her with the employment and residential supports needed for her to live as independently as possible with dignity and grace. To this end, my husband and I are happy to work collaboratively with you.

Thank you. JoAnn Forman