

DDS Testimony December 6, 2016

My name is James Schmitt and I am the father of twin non-verbal autistic boys named RJ and Gunnar. In the 17 years since they were diagnosed, DDS programs have been critical to the stability of our family life. Our first introduction to DDS programs was the use of the John Dempsey Respite Center in Putnam for both boys for one weekend per quarter. This provided our boys with a safe environment with specially trained staff.

Gunnar was introduced into the VSP program now known as the BSP program on 10/11/2006 when we were unable to maintain his safety due to his escalating behaviors common with severely autistic children. Even after securing our house with locks and alarms, Gunnar has been able to escape from his home. He requires direct line of sight supervision at all times. Due to the VSP program, Gunnar received further treatment at the Lakeview Neurorehabilitation Center in New Hampshire for two months when his behaviors were unmanageable in his home environment.

RJ was added to the VSP program on 2/21/2012. This program allowed the hiring of personal support individuals that provide a safe environment in RJ and Gunnar's home setting as well as help them with the activities of daily life and to participate in their community.

My boys currently attend River Street School in Windsor and as they will age out in a year and a half, my wife and I are extremely concerned how we will care for them as we continue to age. My boys will always require 24 hour care. DDS services have been and are an essential to my family maintaining our family unit. Although it does not exist anymore, the John Dempsey Center and its staff were a valuable resource to our family from 2000—2013. These centers and group homes need long term staff because special needs persons require skilled and consistent care. The workers need to make a livable wage so they can focus on the one important job of taking care of the residents. The state looks to save money through privatization and the vital services like music and speech therapies are reduced or outright eliminated. There isn't even any guarantee that any future cost savings would be reinvested into the homes and services to allow more people to benefit from the program who are currently on waiting lists or those who will soon be added. There shouldn't even be a waiting list! These families are in crisis now. They can't wait. I know!!

In closing, I am very concerned that DDS will be just rolling over their existing budget and not increasing it. With the demand for services growing and the current demand not being met, DDS will still have to continue to reduce services to its clients.