



Dannel P. Malloy  
Governor

State of Connecticut  
Department of Developmental Services



Jordan A. Scheff  
Acting Commissioner

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES  
SELF ADVOCATE COORDINATORS'  
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

**March 13, 2017**

Hello Senators and Representatives of the Public Health Committee.

I am Jossie Torres. I am a Self-Advocate Coordinator for the Department of Developmental Services BUT I am also a mom, a working and tax paying citizen of Connecticut, and a strong advocate.

I am honored and proud to promote the **Governor's bill [S.B. No. 796](#) An Act Concerning the Use of Respectful and Person-First Language.**

I had the pleasure, along with my colleagues, to be part of the Governor's Bill signing in 2011 for Respectful Language. Since then the Self Advocate Coordinators of DDS have worked to promote using language to show respect for each other.

I personally know what it means to not be seen as a person but as a disability. When people don't think about the words they use to talk with people, they can be hurtful. I do not like to be referred to as a client, a ward, a patient, handicapped, or the "R" word. I am Jossie and I am a person first! I know I have challenges, but everyone does. I need the support that will assist me to be the best I can be. Support does not mean I am any different than you. I may need a little more explanation of something, or more assistance to complete something, but there is no reason that should change how you see me. I just want to be treated with respect. Call me by my name.

Last year, the DDS Self Advocate Coordinators launched a campaign to eliminate disrespectful words and focus on person first language. The campaign is "We Are People – Call Me By My Name". We are hoping to get everyone in Connecticut to respect us. To promote our campaign, we wrote a pledge and have had over 1000 people take the pledge. We think the pledge helps people think about their words and start understanding the need to use respectful and person first language.

It would be my honor if you would take the pledge with me today and we can add your names to the over 1000 people who are already supporting us to make a difference. I will read it to you now.

## I PLEDGE:

- To advocate and accept my responsibility to be respectful to the individuals I work with and for.
- To RESPECT and treat all individuals equally.
- To Call each person by their name and refer to them as "INDIVIDUALS" and stop using the word "CLIENT"
- To Support self-advocacy and stand up for individuals' human rights.
- To be an advocate for "No More R Word" in my work place and everywhere I go.
- To Assist and make sure that each person that I work with can make their own choices, be part of a community of their choice, and feel accepted to be themselves.
- I will use People First Language, which means seeing THE person NOT the disability, using words and terms that are easier for people to understand.
- To be an ambassador for Self Advocates, Speak up for People First Language, and Be the voice for change that makes peoples' lives happen!

I encourage all of you here today, and all other legislators, to sign this pledge. I will leave copies of the pledge with the committee staff today, and they will be collecting the signed copies to give back to the DDS Self Advocate Coordinators. We appreciate your support of the pledge and of Governor Malloy's bill, 796. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this important issue.