

## Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 173 to Increase the Reimbursement Rate to HCBS Waiver Services

My adult son, Zachary, has Fragile X Syndrome which is on the autism spectrum. We have been fortunate to have day services provided for Zachary through the I/DD waiver since 2003. His first day program had a 1-2 staff to client ratio. This low ratio made it possible to work on building both life skills and job skills. The clients planned their lunch menus for the week, went grocery shopping, prepared their lunches and cleaned up afterward. They did volunteer work in the community including collating a church newsletter and making River Festival buttons. This program emphasized physical fitness. They went swimming at the Y twice a week and practiced for every Special Olympic sport and were involved in Special Olympic events. Over time, more clients were added. Some had behavior problems that made it difficult to be out in the community. One new client was physically aggressive. Although additional staff were added, the program became one where they stayed at the day center and did crafts and board games, which my hyperactive son who has poor manual dexterity did not like and could not participate in.

Zachary then moved to a day program which had a 1 to 4 staff client ratio. None of the clients were aggressive or had severe behaviors. They were out in the community every day. While at this program, Zachary enjoyed volunteering at the Humane Society, the Zoo, and swimming at the Y. After 6 months, this faith-based program closed due to lack of funding.

In 2010 Zach moved to his current day program. It has grown since he started there, and now has 40 clients. The staff-to-client ratio may look good on paper, but in reality, is about 1 to 8. About 10% of the clients need a one-on-one ratio to keep them from hurting others. Funding for this is not provided, but it has to be done for safety. Several clients have physical disabilities in addition to intellectual/developmental disabilities and require staff assistance for basics such as going to the bathroom. In the beginning, Zach was able to go swimming once a week. Now they never go swimming. Zachary's activities in the community appear to be delivering Meals on Wheels once a week, occasionally bowling and eating out.

One of Zachary's lunch outings could have ended tragically. Zachary wanted a hamburger so staff drove him to a nearby Wendy's. Zachary likes just plain hamburgers. That is what staff ordered for him. On the way back to the day center Zach opened his bag and found a cheeseburger. Zachary was furious and hit the driver. Then he jumped out of the car screaming and hitting himself. This occurred near a major intersection that has heavy traffic. Staff was able to get him back in the car and return to the day center where Zach lay on the floor and cried and could not calm down.

The fast food employee whose mistake triggered Zachary's jumping out of the car probably earns more than the staff who had to deal with the consequences of that mistake. From hearing the stories of other families, I know that direct care staff cope daily with challenging behaviors such as my son demonstrated. Direct care staff are responsible for keeping clients safe and alive, which requires a much higher skill set than making burgers. In order to hire and retain good direct care staff, they must be compensated fairly. Please raise the reimbursement rate so we can take a step in that direction.

Kay Soltz  
Wichita  
ksoltz@cox.net