

Testimony on Senate Bill 2012
Developmental Disabilities
Senate Appropriations Committee
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Tammy Amundson, Development Homes
Mother of person supported

Chairman Fisher and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 2012 in regard to developmental disability services. My name is Tammy Amundson. I am the mother of one son who is 23. My son Joshua was diagnosed at about age 2 with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, and Mental Retardation. He is non-verbal and has severe self-abusive behaviors. Most of the behaviors are due to his being non-verbal and people not knowing what he needs or wants, and his frustration getting this across to staff.

In October of 2004, Joshua moved into an ICF-MR group home that is operated by Development Homes in Grand Forks. This was a very big adjustment for everyone. For Joshua, trying to have someone that doesn't know him trying to figure out his needs, and for staff to have the frustration of trying to help him when he isn't able to tell them what he wants or needs.

I also have been employed with Development Homes since June of 2006. I supervise the "float pool", the group of employees hired to fill in at the different sites if they have openings, to provide back-up when the residential program managers cannot find people to fill their shifts. I had openings when I took the position, and currently am short by 5 employees. Based on a survey done by Development Homes, and what staff have told me, one of the main reasons people leave is because of low wages. We cannot compete with other employers in town who can offer better wages. Shift work is another reason

people leave. Overnight shifts aren't interesting to a lot of people, but that is part of the job of making sure our clients get the services they need when they need them, 24 hours a day.

The turnover of staff in the group home where my son Joshua lives has been huge. During the two years he has lived there, at least 30 people have come and gone. The consistency has not been there for him, and that is so important to safety and well-being of all of the people who live there. Joshua needs staff one-on-one with him 24 hours a day, and he is totally dependent on them for many things, but most importantly for his safety and health. It takes a great deal of time and patience to get to know Josh, and for the bond and trust to develop. If we aren't able to keep staff that are so important to him, the consistency is just not there for him to be successful. We have the data that shows the more consistent his staffing and conditions are, the less self-abusive behaviors he has.

It takes a lot of time and training for the comfort zone to be established with the individuals we serve at Development Homes. To obtain this we need staff who are going to make a commitment to this profession. When they can go somewhere else and make more money, they can unfortunately miss out on a very rewarding career. I feel the goal would be to have people want to make this a career and have the lives of our loved ones be as full as they can be.

In closing, to "Value our most Vulnerable" I would respectfully ask you to consider the increases that the North Dakota Association of Community Facilities is requesting, including an increase of wages of \$1.50 per hour for direct support staff, plus the 5% inflationary increase each year and 3% increase in benefits, so expenses in these areas do not negatively affect wages. Thank you.