

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
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Testimony offered by
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Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Senate Finance Committee

My name is Joe Moore and I'm speaking on behalf of my adult son who has developmental disabilities.

First, I would also like to thank you for retaining language in the budget to guarantee the continued availability of sheltered workshops and day services. Both our private and county-board workshops are shining stars that could be held up as examples to the nation. CMS has overstepped in trying to force Ohio to fix something that isn't broken. Individuals in our state already have the choice of pursuing community employment or entering a sheltered workshop. That choice is worth fighting for and we are grateful that you are standing with us.

Secondly, I would like to talk about the DD Bill of Rights and I urge your support for amendment (HC 2329) that protects guardians' and parents' rights to assist their ward/child in making decisions.

When a judge appoints someone as a guardian for an individual with intellectual/developmental disabilities, that decision is made because, in the opinion of the court, that individual's disabilities may make it difficult for him/her to make fully informed decisions especially when it comes to complex issues like appropriate services to guarantee his/her health and well-being. The situation can be further complicated by the fact that some individuals are not able to speak and advocate for themselves due to the nature or severity of their disabilities. In a conversation with our local probate judge, he told me that when he appoints a guardian, in the eyes of the court the guardian and the individual become one.

The most basic responsibilities of the guardian is to assist the individual in making decisions, to ensure that the best interests of the individual are protected and to defend against coercion.

You have, no doubt, heard from individuals with developmental disabilities who have asked you to strike the new language from the DD Bill of Rights. I can appreciate their position, but it's critical that you remember that disabilities cover a spectrum ranging from severe to mild. Your charge is to protect everyone, especially those unable to ask for your help.

The sounds that should resonate most loudly in your ears are not the voices of individuals with DD who are able to speak for themselves nor the pleas of the associations that purport to represent all citizens across Ohio with developmental disabilities. When it's quiet, when you

hear nothing, know that the silence represents the thousands of voices of individuals who can't speak for themselves. They can't pick up the phone and call you. They can't send you an email. They can't offer testimony here today. They can't tell you that their wishes are not represented by an association. As you deliberate on these topics, please listen to the silence.