

Honorable Mark Romanchuk, Chair, and Members of the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Mark Butler and I reside in Whitehall, Ohio. My son Andrew Butler is developmentally disabled, having been profoundly affected by autism and an intellectual disability. Like most severely disabled children in Ohio, Andrew benefited from home-based services and special education programs for most of his life. As Andrew grew into adolescence, he became prone to violent outbursts which caused him to be expelled from school and to become a danger to our family.

Private insurance and Medicaid were unable to pay for the residential treatment Andrew needed. In 2014, my wife and I were forced to surrender custody of our son to Franklin County Children's Services in order to obtain the necessary funding for his treatment. Our devastation was compounded by the fact that Andrew was placed into a treatment facility near Ironton, Ohio – two hours away from our family home. We were lucky, some of Ohio's so-called "multi-system youth" are placed in facilities out of state.

After nearly two-years of making the weekly pilgrimage to spend time with our son, our situation has improved. Our story has been shared widely and both county and state agencies have worked to create pilot programs for kids like Andrew. After turning eighteen last year, Andrew has been able to return to our custody and our community.

Not every family is able to obtain the same happy conclusion to the struggles they face with their multi-system children. Many suffer in silence: ashamed to admit that they live in fear of their own child or afraid that they will lose their child forever.

It does not have to be this way. Last year, Ohio's Joint Legislative Committee on Multi-System Youth issued recommendations to help families like ours. These recommendations need funding. The proposed budget includes but a fraction of the funds needed to help Ohio's multi-system youth. I am asking that you work to increase that funding to the levels recommended by the committee and to continue to seek ways to help kids like Andrew.

Thank you.

Mark Butler