

Chair Burke, Vice Chair Manning, my Senator Jones and distinguished members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is John Munnis Jr. and I am an adult who was born with Spina Bifida. I come today to ask you to restore the funding to the Department of Developmental Disabilities that was in the Governor's budget so that the DODD can carry out its work promoting inclusion.

I grew up in a world in the 1970s where you did not see people with disabilities. What that meant is that there were a lot of negative assumptions and ignorance. There was the grade school teacher who wanted to take me out of class to work on my gait. There were those would talk to me slowly when learning that I had Hydrocephalus – something that often accompanies Spina Bifida. And all throughout grade-school there was an initial assumption that I was fragile – especially in gym class.

But I was lucky. Others with disabilities were completely segregated. That was the problem. Society had not come to see people with disabilities as just regular people. Inclusion breeds respect.

Finally, I would compare the benefits the exposure that inclusion brings to another area where exposure enhances civil rights – race. When I was a young boy in Philadelphia in the 1960s, our next-door neighbors were African-American and they had a boy my age. Reece and I were friends. Exposure breeds respect for others.

I would like that same exposure (inclusion) for people with disabilities, so that people don't talk to me slowly if I reveal that I was born with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus. And yes, it has happened more than once in my life upon first meeting people.

Thank you.