

## **Senate Medicaid Finance Committee Testimony by Rajai Saleh**

**May 14, 2015**

Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Cafaro and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Am. Sub. House Bill 64, the biennial budget bill. My name is Rajai Saleh and I am a 32 year old woman with a disability who chooses to live independently in the community. I would like to ensure that the "DD Bill of Rights" be kept in its' original form by striking the language changes proposed in H.B. 64. I would also like to make sure that the proposed phase out of independent providers be kept out of the State Budget.

The proposed language changes to Section 5123.62 of H.B. 64, commonly referred to as the "DD Bill of Rights" should be removed from the bill and returned to its original form. As an individual with a disability and an advocate for others with disabilities, I find this to be very harmful to freedom and independence. Many of us individuals had to go through so many hoops to gain independence. One of the biggest struggles was the fight to be integrated in the community. If it were up to parents/guardians to make that decision, then many more individuals would be institutionalized and would not be able to enjoy equal opportunities in the community. Some parents/guardians can be abusive and have taken advantage of individuals with disabilities. Many of us have college degrees, have professional jobs, have families and contribute to the community. Each case is different, and I understand there may be some individuals who cannot make their own decisions, but to add language where this would be implied to all individuals in the DD community would risk taking away self-determination.

I would also like to make sure that any reference to the proposed phase out of independent providers be kept out of the State Budget. I use an independent provider, and need to have a say in how the new self-direction model transitions. My care is so specific and personal, so I cannot risk having the State making decisions about my care. Many individuals with disabilities have friends or family that work as independent providers, and many times that person provides care for more than 8 hours a day, so it is their full-time job. There are so many unknowns in this new model such as how many hours of care an individual can have a day, what the budget will be like and what the provider is paid. We care for our providers and would like to see them compensated well. Keeping this out of the State Budget would help us be flexible in working with the directors on the issues that need to be worked out.

Both these issues come down to freedom and choice. If you take away choice, you lower quality of life, and you risk individuals with disabilities getting institutionalized, and this will set things back tremendously. Please don't take away choice and freedom from people with disabilities. Thank you for listening and I welcome any questions.