

Anna Joy Brown - Testimony on HB 2685  
March 7, 2017

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Sanchez, and Vice Chair Olson, members of the committee, my name is Anna Joy Brown. I am a mother of a child with developmental disabilities and I have worked in and seen the I/DD system from virtually all aspects. Many things require improvement, but for me personally, the lack of options to live independently in a place of my son's choice, is a big problem.

Our son, Nathan, is now 36 years old and lives in a group home run by Sunny Oaks in Monmouth, OR. He has multiple severe and complicated disabilities. But, he is able to use a one-arm drive wheelchair because he does have the use of one arm. He is also non-verbal so is dependent on others to know and use his communication systems. He does know some sign language and can use picture "icons" – but only if people are trained on how to use them. He has his own business called Nathan's Choice, where he delivers coffee to customers. He is an integrated, productive worker in the community, and he is a joyous and good person. We are very proud of him.

Nathan lived with us until he was 33. As with most people with I/DD, moving out of home is a forced decision due to the lack of options. For years Nathan refused to even visit group homes. The only viable choice that existed was for us to move out of our house instead of him. If we wanted our son to live in his hometown in a wheelchair accessible home, where he has social

connections which cannot be reproduced elsewhere, living where he does now was a forced choice.

Nathan has good staff, but the house is chronically understaffed. They can maintain basic health and safety, when fully staffed, but do not have the time or resources to train staff, for example, to use our son's augmentative communication systems. So, he vocalizes, and sometimes, points in a general direction. But basically, his staff can't communicate with him his way. I think this is tragic.

The lack of resources and options to live independently hurts Nathan and it hurts the people and agencies that want to help him; it makes it hard for them to do their job right. Nathan pays the price. We need to make sure people with disabilities have real options and choices so that they can live integrated and dignified lives.