

## **Erik Ferguson -**

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chair Sanchez, Vice-Chair Olson, members of the committee, my name is Erik Ferguson. I am here today in support of House Bill 2685 not because I am particularly politically savvy but because I passionately believe we need to go farther to insure that an adult with a developmental or intellectual disability receives a choice of living situation which includes the possibility of living in the community with in-home support. It is widely understood via the Olmstead decision that "institutional placement of persons who can handle and benefit from community settings perpetuates unwarranted assumptions that persons so isolated are incapable of or unworthy of participating in community life." Second, "confinement in an institution severely diminishes the everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural enrichment."

As a person with a disability who has many friends with disabilities I have witnessed first hand the isolation that inappropriate institutional placements can cause. I have witnessed people in their 30's placed in nursing facilities with individuals much older than themselves. They lacked the freedom to choose the time and quality of the care they received and age appropriate recreational activity was completely unavailable. Depression, hopelessness, and excessive physical illness became commonplace. I have spent most of my adult life afraid of this same fate.

For now, I am lucky. I live in my own home with my wife who also experiences a disability. We have part time jobs and are working artists. We are taxpayers. We have a fine network of neighbors and friends. We have pets, a cat and a dog and we are generally thriving.

None of this would be possible without a network of home care workers funded through a medicaid based program. I would like to know that my friends with intellectual and developmental disabilities are offered this same choice to thrive, and while it may not be appropriate in every single case I believe it is possible even in the case of severe disability, to live in the community and experience all of its benefits.