

Joint Ways and Means Committee
March 28, 2017
8:00am-10:30am

Co-Chairs Senator Steiner Hayward and Representative Rayfield and members of the committee:

My name is Sara Williams, and I am from Corvallis Oregon. I am here as the parent of a 9 year old child, who is here with me today and is receiving case management services and support from Benton County Developmental Diversity Services. We have benefitted from their services for a total of four years.

My son has what they now call "Social Communication Disorder", previously known as Asperger Syndrome. He's relatively mild on that spectrum, but parenting him was not easy. I'm a single parent with my own disabilities both physical and psychiatric, which interferes with many parenting activities most families enjoy such as going on trips, going to the park or other social activities kids need to develop their skills, facilitating friendships, and being physically active outside the home. I'm doing the best I can, and he's doing great, but we both couldn't have gotten here without a lot help.

When I first realized my son wasn't developing normally, I didn't know what to do. So I researched options and decided to have him do occupational therapy, which helped a lot, but we were still having a lot of problems at home and at day care. By the time my son had gone through four daycares in a year, I finally decided I couldn't continue to work full time and I quit my job to stay home with him. Then began the search for resources and ways to make it through. Thankfully, one of the first resources I discovered was Developmental Diversity Services (then called Developmental Disability Services), and once my son was approved for services, our case manager was key in several ways.

Our case manager not only set my son up for in-home services (or respite care) through the then PC-20 system, but she also helped us get signed up for a dance class designed for developmentally delayed kids, got us information about signing up for parks and recreation scholarship opportunities, and so many other important things. In our case, every little bit helped. The most important thing she did for us, though, was helping my son get SSI benefits started. We had little income at that point because I wasn't working, and we were about to lose our apartment. The second most important thing she did for us was help us get into the housing we are now in through The Arc of Benton County. Without our case

manager, we would have been homeless and dealing with our respective disabilities alone.

Thanks to our case manager at Benton County, we are in a stable home, receiving K-Plan services for my son, and periodically receive help finding resources for our needs.

As for what the K-Plan does for us, primarily it provides my son with those in-home care hours. While he's mostly self-sufficient in typical ways, what he needs help with are social skills and practice. Due to my own disabilities, I cannot really help him with that, and as his diagnosis title states, social communication is his biggest issue. Throughout the four total years of working with his care provider, he has blossomed and is finally able to make bonds with other kids without conflict, play and cooperate with other kids, and develop healthy relationships with other adults. His care provider wasn't the only person involved (rather, he has an entire team), but she has been instrumental.

Now I hear that this committee is considering making cuts to these services, I am concerned that not only will we lose services, but so many other families who need those services even more than we do will lose them as well. I'm concerned that the case managers, who are already critically overburdened by paperwork and caseloads, will lose their jobs and people like us will be left to flounder alone.

I ask you to please leave the current level of funding intact for these services. They are critical for the most vulnerable of our kids.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sara A Williams
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