

Renaë's testimony for Senate Bill 238

Narrative:

Chair Gelser and members of the committee, my name is Renaë Bendix and I am a parent of 21 year old son who is significantly affected by Autism. His name is Cooper and he lives with 24 hour care provided by PCL.

I wanted to give you a quick snapshot of my son so that this testimony has a frame of reference. Cooper is 6' tall and weighs about 215 lbs. He has very limited expressive language but his receptive language skills are much better. He is happiest when he is busy and helpful. When he is happy he is very enjoyable to be around and charms the people around him.

When Cooper is angry it is a different story. He is angriest when he is anxious, when he is ignored and when his triggers are set off. When Cooper is angry he is known to shove people or children or destroy property such as clothing, bedding, towels or household items. "Angry Cooper" can happen very quickly. Thankfully, "angry Cooper" doesn't happen as frequently now as it used to.

As a parent, it is hard to give up the daily responsibility and care of your child, especially one with special needs who has limited language. I have to trust that the people supporting him are kind, honest and have his best interest in mind. I want him to be safe, valued, enriched and happy. That sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? But it's the non-basic job duties that are even more critical for my peace of mind as a parent. Let me give you a scenario...

One of Cooper's staff took him to a public park here in Salem this summer. They were walking the path along the river. On this particular day there was a family with a young girl in the general vicinity. Staff know that crying children can be a trigger for Cooper and that he can reactive negatively to the noise. The young girl was playing peacefully. Cooper's staff knows to stay within arm's reach of him in public and to monitor his surroundings. For an unknown reason, Cooper quickly darted to the family and knocked the child to the ground. The father immediately (and rightfully) became angry and confrontational with Cooper. His staff had to try to calmly explain Cooper while using restraint on Cooper for his safety and those around him. This meant that the staff also had to place them self between Cooper and an angry, aggressive adult. The police were called and luckily the officer was reasonable and explained that pressing charges would not be meaningful and appropriate. This ordeal was very volatile and had the staff not handled it appropriately there could have been an altercation and Cooper could now have a criminal record. This is one of my worst nightmares for Cooper.

DSP's aren't entry level employees. Their value shouldn't be compared to a fast food worker or a car wash attendant. They are asked to be record keepers, event planners, security officers, problem solvers, chauffer's, cooks, appointment keepers and hygiene supervisors. They may clean up feces and vomit. They are trained in restraint. They may be physically assaulted or have their own personal property ruined by the people they support. They are asked to do all of this in a positive manner, even on the worst days. This is asking a lot of a minimum wage employee. Why would anyone want to do this kind of work for very little pay?

Recruiting qualified people as DSP's is difficult. Retaining them is even harder. I want my son to be cared for by competent staff who are paid well enough to remain in their positions for the hard work they perform. Staff turnover is very stressful for my son. The learning curve is long and it takes weeks before

things go smoothly with new staff. All of this adds chaos to my son's life and chaos equals behavior issues.

Please consider passing this bill so that agencies can pay DSP's appropriately for the work they are asked to perform. My son deserves highly qualified staff and if you have a loved one supported by a DSP then your loved one deserves the same.

Thank you