

Chair Beyer, Chair Nosse, Members of the Committee,

Good morning. My name is Carrie Salehiamin and I live in Portland. I have been married for 19 years and I am the mother of 3 teenagers. My son, Nic, is 17 years-old. He is the captain of the lacrosse team and is very serious about his 4.2 GPA. Ava is 15. She loves to dance and sing to hip hop. She teaches herself to cook and bake by watching Food Network. Marielle is 13 years-old and attends a performing arts magnet school. She plays 3 musical instruments and loves the theatre. All 3 of my teenagers roll their eyes at me at least once every day.

Ava was diagnosed with Autism at a very early age and in spite of extensive therapies throughout her life, at the age of 15, she is still unable to use words to communicate. This makes her what people consider significantly disabled. We started receiving case management services when Ava was around 11 years-old and I came here today to let you know how profoundly those services have changed the trajectory of Ava's life in all of the best ways possible. Our vision for Ava's future is the same as our vision for our other children. We want her to be a happy, independent and responsible adult who contributes to her community. I will admit I don't always know how to get there. Our case manager shares that vision for Ava's future, and works very hard to help us figure out how to achieve those goals.

When we are building a Service Plan with Ava, our Case Manager challenges us by saying; "Tell me how that will help Ava be more independent. Tell me how that will help her achieve her goals of an independent life". This line of questioning has taught me to be very thoughtful about what services we pursue and why they are important. "How will this help Ava be more independent" has become my personal frame of reference for her at home, in school and in therapy.

There was a time when I was unable to take Ava out into the community by myself. Case management connected us with a behavior support specialist and personal care workers who came out into the community with us so that Ava and I could both learn how to do that together successfully. Many, many long months later, Ava and I have regular mother/daughter days out together - just the two of us. We get time together, and she gets to practice making choices about where she wants to go and what she wants to do. Very important to 15 year-old girl.

This system is very difficult to navigate, full of language and jargon that I don't understand, and its not the only system we navigate. But our Case Manager and my family are a team. We agree that it is her job to figure out how to connect all of those dots and make them work for Ava. We also agree that I have responsibilities as Ava's mother to manage things like her healthcare and therapy and overall wellness and we carefully sort through our roles together.

And there are times when the Service System is not what we need. When we were struggling with Ava's school, or with OHP, our Case Manager fully admitted she was not the expert, but she also connected me with whoever was. When navigating the system was hard, she was there to help us. And when navigating life was hard, she was there to connect us with our local Family Network.

Case Management is vitally important to helping Ava build the life she wants, with the right supports and the right connections. Please fully fund Case Management.

Thank you for your time,  
Carrie Salehiamin