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Testimony to the Senate Health and Welfare Committee

I'm Nicole LeBlanc from Montpelier. I'm on the Autism Spectrum and I work for Green Mountain Self-Advocates. We are a peer-run organization with 21 local self-advocacy groups across the state.

I am here to talk about Developmental Services. I want to take a close look, from my point of view, about the frequent claim that our system is not sustainable.

In January, Commissioner Wehry from DAİL testified in a several committees about the cost per person of people receiving Developmental Services. The graph she used showed costs slightly going down in the past 3 or more years. And the figures she shared had not been adjusted for cost of living increases.

So then why do we constantly need new caseload dollars for Developmental Services? According to DAİL, only 30% of the children and adults eligible for services, get any services. The remaining 70% rely on family and friends for support. Each year some people face a crisis in their life and they turn to state government for support.

One of my roles as an advocate is I serve on the Equity Committee for Developmental Services. This DAIL committee meets once a month to review requests for new services and makes recommendations to the Commissioner. Last Monday I began to prepare for our monthly meeting. For February there are 28 people facing some sort of crisis, requesting for new services. For the record, 13 requests for services are from new people and 15 requests are from folks who are already in the system.

For the rest of my testimony I want to give you a snapshot of the needs of the people requesting help.

- A person who is aging out DCF custody. He left his family when he was 13. He has a history of being in and out of residential placements like Woodside.
- A 19 year old who lives with her mother and sister. The mother works fulltime and the sister is sick and does not attend school. The mother is at her breaking point managing the nursing care of the younger daughter and needs help to continue to meet the needs of the older daughter to continue to live at home.
- A 19 year old who lives with her family who is also taking care of 80 year old grandparents who live in the home. An older sibling has been helping out but she is leaving for grad school. The 19 year old is dangerous to both herself and others. The family needs help so the person can continue living at home.
- A 20 year old, refugee settled here in last July. He has had a difficult transition and is frequently upset and confused. He doesn't speak English and can't take care of himself or go about the community on his own. His extended family wants to keep taking care of him but

they need help. His cousin, who is the main care provider, has had to leave work frequently to come home and help deal with crisis situations. This cousin has since lost his job.

- A 75 year old who lived with his mother until 4 years ago when she died. Since then his sister was taking care of him but now her health is failing.
- A 33 year old, lives in his own apartment with support of his mother but she is can't do it anymore and needs help. Without support he falls into unsafe relationships. He has a history of being exploited and abused.
- A 20 year old who spends equal time living with his divorced parents. He is losing his personal care supports. He can't be left at home alone for long periods of time.
- A 58 year old who has always lived with a boyfriend and support of her mother. But now her health needs have increased and natural supports can't do it alone anymore.
- A 21 year old who is graduating from high school and lives with his parents and can't be left alone. The family just wants help to care for their son when they are working.
- An 18 year old who lives with his adopted family. He has a history of trauma and has been in DCF custody since he was 11. His family just needs 15 hours a week of respite to stabilize the home situation.
- A 19 year old who lived with his Mom out of state but she couldn't handle him so he moved here to live with his Dad. In past 2 years an agency has been sending in staff to help out but recently he has

assaulted his Dad too many times and so the father is saying he can't live there anymore.

- A 21 year old aging out of children's personal care needs services to keep living with his mother.
- A 45 year old who lives with a shared-living provider but who recently underwent surgery and requires more intensive care
- A 60 year old who lives with his mother who is in her 80's can no longer provide support.
- A very challenging 20 year old who lives with his family and who is losing his children's personal care services.
- A 63 year old who grew up in Brandon Training School and has since lived independently. Now the person's health has declined. Local business owners are complaining about him loitering and noticed he is not taking care of himself any more.
- A 17 year old who is aging out of DCF custody
- A 5 year old with very complex health needs lives with his parents who are exhausted and need help to keep him home.

There are still 10 more, equally challenging situations that I don't have time to mention. The committee that I am on, reviews these situations and makes sure they are indeed eligible to receive funding. We also review the cost effectiveness of the plan of service.

What I see are situations where any new money that is appropriated for Developmental Services, goes to meet the real needs of people.

Thank you for listening.