

February 4, 2015 Senate Health and Welfare Committee

Hello my name is Tracy Thresher and I live in Barre, Vermont. I am a self-advocate and mentor working with and receiving services from Washington County Mental Health. Thank you for listening to me I am grateful to be here.

I have been using supported typing and having a voice since 1990. Not being able to express myself was like being in a world of silence. I couldn't tell people what I liked and didn't like. People thought that I didn't understand what was being said to me. It was frustrating and made me angry and I withdrew.

The experience of the world looks different from my experience. Most people take their ability to talk for granted and I take my inability to talk quite seriously. I live with it every day – it is always there each time someone wants to read my thoughts.

The impact of learning to speak up and have a voice has been quite meaningful for me. I have typed life goals and dreams that have actually come true. This would never have happened without supported typing.

This is the time to stand up for what is right and that is no more budget cuts. With more money for new people we are encouraged but that money cannot be taken from people receiving services. That will only put me and my friends at risk of losing the very supports and services that made it possible for me to be here today.

Thinking that I could testify in front of you today without my fearless support Rachel Johnson simply would not be possible. Highly trained staff are worth their weight in gold and more pay is so important - let's stay with that commitment and please no more budget cuts.

Thank you so much for hearing my words today.