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May 4, 2021 ~~ Act H.243

An Act relating to a working group on providing services to adults with Autism

I am Max Barrows. I am person with an intellectual disability. I am on the autism spectrum. I receive Developmental Services and I live with my parents in Worcester. And for the past 13 years I have been working for Green Mountain Self-Advocates.

I want to begin by thanking the members of this committee for your support of Green Mountain Self-Advocates and other peer organizations to be able to access COVID relief funds. We very much appreciate your support. It has made it easier for us to continue to provide peer supports virtually during the COVID emergency. It also helped us to keep producing booklets and videos about COVID in plain language.

And thank you for this opportunity to comment on the status of services for autistic people in Vermont. For many people with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities this has been a tough year. The challenges we face a different for each of us.

- Some people who get services are essential workers and they have been working throughout the pandemic.
- DAİL has reported that some people who employment services have returned to work without their job coaches and have been successfully working on their own.
- Many people have been reunited with their workers and are getting back out into their communities.
- And we hear from some individuals that they have lost support staff all together or are receiving fewer hours of services each week.

Green Mountain Self-Advocates is pleased you are asking about Developmental Services. We have a few pressing concerns.

- Last week we participated in a Town Hall organized by the state and hosted by the VT Developmental Disabilities Council and Green Mountain Self-Advocates about

ways to spend the 10% increased funding to State Medicaid Programs for one year. As you probably know Vermont will get about \$48 million to improve Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). We know that the state is still waiting for guidance from CMS about how they can spend these one-time dollars in the next 11 months. People with disabilities and their families are eager to be involved in how to spend this money.

- And speaking of funding, our members are wondering what happened to money that was budgeted for our services, but then services were not provided because of COVID. We are sure there is a good answer. We have been asking the state to provide us with some accountability.

In regard to Act H.243, an Act relating to a working group on providing services to adults with Autism, if it does get passed we would recommend Kristofer Medina to be on the workgroup. Kris is a person with autism who types to communicate. Kris has testified to this committee in the past and he would be an excellent representative.

In general, Green Mountain Self-Advocates focuses on the overall needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In our peer groups and educational activities all people with intellectual disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum, are involved. We advocate together. We have a lot in common. We all need a safe place to live, a job, opportunities to make a difference, friends, love. Many of us need support to communicate, reduce loneliness and maintain emotional health and wellbeing.

We are glad that you want to address the needs of autistic people and think it makes sense to do that by looking at the lives of all people with intellectual disabilities. We would like to point out that the current eligibility rules for Developmental Services are different for people on the Autism Spectrum. Most people who get developmental services have to have an IQ of 70 or less and deficits in what is referred to as adaptive behavior. Autistic people are not required to have an IQ of 70 or below to get services. One recommendation we have is that this workgroup could look at getting rid of using IQ scores to determine eligibility. We think the same rules should apply to all people with intellectual disabilities.

Thank you for listening to our testimony.