

February 16, 2022, Human Services Committee Testimony By Hasan Ko
Issues Impacting the Lives of People with Developmental Disabilities Living in Vermont

I am Hasan Ko. I am 28 years old. I live in Winooski with my family. I came to the United States from Burma when I was in high school. I went to Winooski High School and have received developmental services from Champlain Community Services. Thanks, you for listening and caring about my services.

I work for Green Mountain Self Advocates. Last spring my support person, Judy, passed away. My service coordinator checked in with me every week after that. The agency tried to get me a staff person to support me working and community time. It took until December to get Rachel, my new staff person. It can be a money problem; they need to pay the staff more. And many workers during the pandemic decided to get out of their jobs and do something new.

The subject about hiring my sister to work with me did not come up. But the agency did ask what we needed, and they gave some money to my family during the pandemic. They said they had extra money to help families. When I did not have staff to support me, I got support from the people around me. My family. I live with my family. Also, I got a new job working with Max at Green Mountain Self-Advocates and I got support from them. They know about who I am and how to help me

I am very close with my agency. I am on the board. I know what is happening inside and outside. What I mean is I know what is happening. When it comes to community time with the staff I know it is difficult for them to keep track of what the people with disabilities do.

Right now, in my meeting with our self-advocacy group, we are doing staff training. When new staff are hired they will come to our group to listen to find out what we do. We are giving them homework to do. Most of the staff need to know more about our disabilities and what we do. And how to support us. **They need to know**

about our experiences having a disability. The point of the homework is that they learn about disability from us.

We do this training for free.

As you all know there are so many types of people who come to have service. Some of us are from different cultures too. When people have different cultures there can be a barrier of language and how to communicate with us and our families. We need support but we need to live our life in our own way. **The state needs to have rules about how staff respect people's culture.** They need to be aware of what we need.

Self-advocacy is important to me and other people. we need support from somewhere. It can be our own friends who have disabilities. Some people with disabilities do they have opportunities to be independent. Someone who uses a wheelchair may not have as many opportunities to work.

We want the option to have a disabled friend to show us how to be independent and how to live your life. At my job, I teach students with disabilities about life when they finish school.

The good thing is when I am stuck people will help me, no matter what kind of trouble I get into I like getting support from my peers, my disability friends. For me, it is good because they understand how we are feeling. They know how we support each other. We can talk about how we learn things. How I used to be in your shoes one day, so I know how you feel. A peer knows it can be hard to try a new opportunity to have freedom around my disability life.