

February 16, 2022, Human Services Committee Testimony by Stirling Peebles Issues Impacting the Lives of People with Developmental Disabilities

I am Stirling Peebles. I live with my family in Montpelier. I work for the University of Vermont and for Green Mountain Self-Advocates. I get developmental services from Washington County Mental Health. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss my life and my services.

The Americans with Disabilities Act says we have the right to live and work with everyone else. We have the right to go anywhere people without disabilities go. We have the right to do anything people without disabilities do. We have the right to get help when we need it.

The American Disabilities Act also says we have the right to get accommodations. Accommodations are changes that make things easier for people with disabilities. They help us get the same things as people without disabilities.

We already shifted away from sheltered housing when we closed Brandon Training School. And we already shifted away from sheltered employment in 2002 when we closed sheltered workshops. We want everyone to have an equal opportunity to experience life like other people and have friends, job, education, and an affordable place to live. How would you feel if you were in our position? We want a chance to show you what we can do.

We want our voices to be heard. Please talk to us directly and not just our case managers or parents. I love my parents. And I appreciate that they protect me. But I don't want to be protected from living my life. I work at the University of Vermont. I feel I am a valued member of the team. It feels awesome.

I hear you want to create more housing options for people with disabilities. My message is it is NOT just about building nice houses. You need to focus on what happens inside those houses. Are we going to get the help we need to succeed?

I don't want to hang out with only people with disabilities. I like variety. When I was in high school, I was in regular education. We know how to do this. We know how to include people. We can't go backwards. Besides the rules say that if you are using federal dollars, you can't segregate people.

People with all kinds of disabilities can help out, be involved, feel like we belong. Having a job makes us be a part of our community. One of our top priorities is people with all kinds of disabilities having jobs. I present at national conferences. All across America people with very significant disabilities have paying jobs. You can carve out job duties and tasks that a person is good at. This is called customized employment. There is room for improvement in Vermont.

Thank you for listening to my testimony. Thank you for taking a closer look at the quality of the services you are giving to us.