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Burlington, VT

Public testimony for:

The Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs

and

The House Committee on General Housing

We are in a pickle! Who knew that once Nicholas's aging parents could no longer take care of him there would be nowhere for him to go? Let me tell you a story.

In 2021 we had several lengthy conversations with our designated agency Howard Center about options for stable housing for our son. We learned there are a few transitional homes, but we were informed by caring Director Delaina Norton that none of them would be appropriate for Nicholas. We talked about options and there were literally none. Shared Living (i.e. Adult Foster Care) was not something we wanted for him, and we learned it is not always feasible to find good matches, especially with the significantly lower number of shared providers during COVID-19.

So we decided to embark on something else; using our home to staff caregivers with the goal of building an accessory dwelling for ourselves, thus enabling our home to be a location for Nicholas's support team. We met every two weeks for a couple months to develop this possibility. We began the intake process before it suddenly stopped. The team at Howard felt Nicholas's needs were too great and they hoped to help by providing us with more services.

That did not happen. Instead we learned of Elizabeth Campbell's beautifully constructed op-ed and contacted her to ask how we could help in the advocacy for "forever homes" and homes with community. We joined a growing number of families, naming ourselves the Developmentally Disabled Housing Initiative (DDHI). Vermont now has a grassroots, parent-led advocacy group seeking for our high support adult children a future all of us could count on. We investigated many progressive housing programs in neighboring states that any of us could imagine living in. We found more. We found community and shared interests.

Vermont clearly needs to be onboard. We will be the first Vermonters since the closing of the Brandon Training School to embark on a project that will pay dividends to future generations of developmentally disabled adults and their families. What will happen to our children after we die can now be fixed, and nourished. Instead of a sad scary scenario we can celebrate that every life in Vermont is taken seriously and accounted for.

Our hardworking parents have been pursuing this in formal committees for more than a year. Largely through our efforts a historic bill was passed by the Legislature last year that recognizing that we need to go forward and begin constructing a plan for our high support developmentally disabled adults. We're not going back. Help us get there. Talk to us about models we researched (yes there is a Models Committee) and who we have been talking to in our own communities throughout Vermont. Keep it going, we have momentum. We thank you for diving in, learning what is going on in Vermont. You'll be astonished at the work done by DDHI, not an agency, not a business but a grassroots group of caring parents who need your help.

Thank you, our elected senators and representatives. Our designated agencies are stretched to the max and so are we. For many exhausted parents who are working 24/7 we need your help as quickly as possible.

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Michael George

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