

Date: April 15, 2024
To: Sen. Ram Hinsdale
From: Kathleen Lynch
Subject: Fwd: your testimony from 2023 - beautiful!!!

Good afternoon ,

I will be present at the Statehouse tomorrow with other Vermont parents of adult children with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities.

It is my hope to listen , to share my perspective as an RN ,mother ,legal guardian and to add another face to the group who have been advocating toward safe, service-supported housing.

I have been encouraged to share the following for your review , my 2023 testimony to legislators in support of wage increases :

' I am writing to express sincere concerns to each of you who are acquainted with our family or may impact our family through your legislative efforts. In addition to our connection as Vermont citizens, some of us have raised children together as neighbors on Appletree Point. I am grateful to you as legislators for respectfully listening to personal perspectives and viewpoints on important issues facing our state.

My husband Tex and I are the proud parents of seven children (all BHS graduates), five of whom are UVM alumni. One holds an undergraduate degree from Boston University as well as graduate degrees from St Michael's and Hunter Colleges. They are employed in the fields of education, healthcare and service industries while choosing to reside in Vermont for connection to family and quality of life.

Our beloved son Patrick, now 30, was born with Down syndrome and he developed Autism at age 3. Patrick lives at home with us here in the New North End of Burlington. He receives waiver supported services through Howard Center. Due to chronic staffing shortages at Howard, he is supported only 3 days per week.

I am scheduled to work in my Surgical RN position at UVMHC this Wednesday and therefore cannot be present to meet with any of you following the Developmental Disabilities Press Conference.

As an RN of 46 years, I recall the tremendous discomfort the Nursing strike placed upon staff tasked with the professional care of our fellow Vermonters. I had

never experienced standing outside my hospital with hundreds of my co-workers in order to address critical patient safety, safe staffing ratios and to highlight wage inequities. In effect the current request before the legislature for a 10% increase in Medicaid wages reminds me of that difficult process.

It is impossible to place a monetary value on an individual in whom you place your trust for the care of your vulnerable adult child, who cannot speak for or protect themselves.

It is even more difficult to convey the concern experienced when a long-time, valued caregiver needs to change positions in search of increased compensation. This can often lead to an uncertain period of transition for individuals (and their families) who rely on stability and familiarity in their daily lives. Staffing vacancies present daily challenges for client case managers as well, who many days are also substituting in a caregiver role. There are also instances where there is no coverage, requiring a parent to be home from work , losing wages , to ensure the safety of their son or daughter. If we as a state are going to be successful in attracting and retaining a qualified, skilled, stable workforce within our social service agencies, an increase in wages is required.

There are 100 people with developmental disabilities currently waiting for residential support.

I extend my thanks to the legislators who heard family testimonies and passed Act 186 last year .'

Thanks to the dedicated work of the DDHI group, we now know over 600 units of housing are needed for young adults who receive waivers and community based services.

Our staffing shortages within social services , inpatient , outpatient and long term care settings persist.

Insufficient wages and lack of affordable housing continue to impact the inability to attract critical qualified candidates to join all sectors of our Vermont workforce.

I kindly ask that you share our story with your colleagues as funding decisions are discussed.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Connor Lynch RN