

2/12/2021

I am in support of the Self-Direction Act SB 441. My daughter, Heather Slatnick, is 29 and has low muscle tone, moderate to severe intellectual disability, swallowing disorder, anxiety disorder and is incontinent. She cannot walk without assistance and uses a wheelchair when out in the community.

We attempted adult day care. There was no consistency with staff and feeding her became an issue. Then I was told because of her behavior, they were not taking her into the community because there wasn't enough staff. I couldn't go with her because I was working and I was told we couldn't hire a one on one for her because that state money, even though was a different service, came out of the same pot and it was not allowed. We had no choice, but to pull her out. She had become a shut in and her social anxiety became worse.

Self-direction has been a lifesaver! She is happy, healthy and living her best life. She goes out into the community daily and she/we can hire staff that Heather likes and is consistent. She has friends, goes to the mall, bowling, grocery stores, participates in classes and more.

Every year, DDA is taking more and more control of what we can and can't do with self-direction. The rules are always changing. They are taking away our support team by putting more restrictions on support brokers who are working for the person as opposed to service coordinators who are employed by the state and county and were told by DDA that their job is to lead us to information and forms, but not actually help us with the ins and outs of making the person-centered plans. DDA is also attempting to put restrictions on who can be an employee including family members. In many cases, the person prefers family and sometimes family are the only ones that can do the job. This has been a blessing during this pandemic. DDA has also defined what community is. My daughter goes to classes at Farring Baybrook Rec Center almost every day (pre-pandemic). DDA rules now state that because she is in classes with her peers and not neurotypical people, it is not considered community. Who are they to decide this? This is her community and as far as I'm concerned, if she's out of the house and going places, she's in the community. What if I told you that you could only interact and be friends with people with intellectual disabilities or you couldn't continue to work at a job you love, because it didn't meet DDA's vision of community?

Self-direction has been an excellent waiver to Heather. The purpose of self-direction is to let the person self-direct their budget to give them their best life and to keep them out of group homes and nursing homes. In the long run, I believe this program saves the counties and the State of Maryland money. As long as the person can prove where the money was spent, there should be minimal rules and constraints imposed by DDA, especially when it comes to community, staff and support brokers.

Thank you for your time and please vote in favor of the Self-Direction Act SB 441. The quality of Heather's life and the lives of others currently in this program are in your hands. Help them to continue living their best life.

Sincerely,

Helaine Slatnick

