

EXHIBIT

DATE

HB

22

1-18-02

2

Good morning, my name is Tracey Orcutt and I am from Butte, Montana. I come to you today as the parent of a 14 year old boy with Autism. In addition to his disability Richie has had a host of health problems since birth. Those issues range from having seizures during bouts of illness, to hospitalizations for dehydration because he refused to drink or eat while ill. Richie would experience frequent bouts with pneumonia, the additional diagnosis of asthma as well and also being micro cephalic and having frequent sinus and ear infections due to his small head size. These frequent infections lead to the insertion of tubes in his ears, the eventual surgery to take out those tubes because Richie developed cysts in both of his ears and the tubes would not come out on their own, to surgery for undescended testicles and hydroceles in both testicles. Richie currently has to be placed under general anesthesia yearly simply to get his teeth cleaned. In addition to his health issues Richie's disability keeps him from being able to express himself verbally and his impulse control is so poor that without adult care 24 hours a day Richie will simply leave the family home alone or run into the street not comprehending the consequences of those actions. These issues coupled with the financial stress of paying enormous Doctor bills because of not qualifying for SSI because my husband's wages were just a little over the allowed amount for SSI has left Richie without a Medicaid card for years. With Richie's health issues being so significant I was not able to work in the past and needed to be available to him at all times. This fact left us financially strapped and not able to pay our portion of Richie's Doctor bills even after our insurance covered his expenses. Our portion of Richie's monthly medication leaves us owing over \$100.00 even after insurance has covered their part. Richie has never been able to have the necessary services in place like ST, OT or PT because we have simply never been able to afford it on top of all of his other bills. Richie's behavioral issues have left us replacing windows in the home because he breaks them and numerous other items because he is at times unable to control his behaviors. At one point in our life we were forced to sell our home because we could no longer afford to pay his medical bills on top of our house payment. Of all the things I have done in my life raising Richie has been by far both the most rewarding and challenging endeavor of my life. For these reasons and on behalf of other families that raise children with disabilities I come to you today to ask you to at the very least continue with the current funding that is available throughout the state for individuals with disabilities. I also implore you to educate parents of children with disabilities on the many

services and providers that are available throughout the state. One of the ways that I feel the state could improve provider services and the methods those providers share information and resources with families is by educating our parents about the providers available throughout the state and the importance of choice among providers. When a family already faces the challenges that may arise in the everyday life of raising individuals with disabilities they need to know that they can turn to their provider for assistance with anything and have the confidence they will know what to do for them and will be able to assist them. A family needs to know that when they talk to their provider and they discuss services that are available throughout the state that they are being offered the opportunity at ALL of the services that are available. A family needs to have confidence in their provider to be able to assess the needs of their individual family and the family member with a disability and know they are being educated to the best of the provider's ability regarding services available to that family. I think the state could be a model for the entire country by providing services to individuals with disabilities by providers that are highly qualified and that rise above the dollar signs of providing services and truly look out for the welfare of each individual family. With these specifications in place as to what constitute a quality disability service provider and the importance of choice among providers being offered to ALL families I believe our state could truly provide services that rise above and beyond and could be the model for the rest of the country to follow.