

Vicki LaFond-Smith, Public Testimony  
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Edith Clark, Madame Chairman, and members of the Committee, my name is Vicki LaFond-Smith, and I live in Helena, Montana. I have lived in Montana my whole life (42 years), and I'm raising my three children here, Christopher & Matthew (twins age 16) and Timmy (age 11).

Christopher & Matthew were born premature, weighing just under 2 lbs. each. Their premature birth has left them with severe developmental, cognitive and physical disabilities. I am writing this testimony, inspired by them, in the hope that by sharing our lives with you, you will in turn be inspired by them when you are making the fiscal decisions for future services for adults, children and families with developmental disabilities.

Having a disability, having children with disabilities, is not a "choice" we are able to make. It is a life "given" by our Creator. We put our faith in God and in the leaders and people of Montana, to help us love and care for those who are given to us. The Disability Services Division, through its Part C Early Intervention Program and Child & Family Program, has a *proven*, successful system of providing supportive and comprehensive services for children and families. Christopher & Matthew are proof, backed by 16 years of experience. They are two of Montana's incredible success stories! I support requests for funding increases from DPHHS, its system's providers and the people served, because *we have to maintain and expand these valuable and necessary services*. Yes, the need is extensive, but a *need* nonetheless. The alternative is, "What if we don't?" and that is tragic to think about as a mother of children with disabilities and as a person with disabilities.

Christopher & Matthew will be graduating from Helena High School in two years. Our family will move on to the next stage, disability services for adults. We have already begun preparing for this *transition* in our lives. Notice how I write "we" and "our"? What happens to Christopher & Matthew will impact all of us. Below we have outlined our fears, our questions to you, because you have the power to answer these questions, to make *choices for our futures*. We respectfully ask you to place yourselves in our shoes—"What if this was a life given to you?"

\*How will DPHHS be able to fund a plan of care when the costs for a person's services are greater than the money they have? How responsive will the system be in a crisis situation? The new rate system used for cost of services and the tool used for determination of need for services is *supposed to be based on the person's "need"* not on a capped allotment of money. We're worried because this is actually happening to people in three Regions in Montana, and the Region we live in will start this new system July 1, 2007. Will this happen to Christopher & Matthew? Then what?

\*Christopher & Matthew will need day services, employment and job coaches to help support them. If the costs for these services are not provided for them, will I have to quit my job to stay home and care for them? I am a single parent. Am I going to lose my source of income? How can I support my family? We're worried because we know two families where moms had to quit their jobs to stay home and provide care for extensive amounts of time. Both were traumatically impacted financially as a result. How long could my family survive without my income? Days, months, years? Will we be seeking support from other service systems? Will this create a crisis situation for our family? Christopher? Matthew? Then what?

\*Christopher & Matthew will need the assistance of providers to help them at home with their personal and living care. If the costs for these services are not provided in their plan, will this responsibility fall solely on my shoulders? There is no money for personal care, there is probably no money for respite care? Will I have the strength and means to provide this for them on my own? Am I working, or not? Am I in a stressed crisis? Am I in any position to contribute to the costs of their care? I am a valuable, but limited resource for my family. Then what?

\*How long can Christopher & Matthew function without day services, employment, personal care and living assistance? We have been training, teaching and educating them for at least 16 years. We have been investing in their future—is all that wasted in adulthood because either the costs for their needed services are more than the plan is funded for or there is no provider of the services they need? What will they do with their lives? Then what?

\*How long can a provider agency deliver services—to a growing number of people who need them--without being sufficiently paid to cover the costs of business? To provide a decent salary, training and education for employees who are devoted to this special and vulnerable population of people? To provide meaningful, productive day services and employment opportunities? To provide supportive education, training, modifications and therapies to children and families? If their reimbursement for rates of services are insufficient, will they close their agency? Will there be a shortage of employees within provider agencies? Will we loose Family Support Specialists—who provide more than case management? Will we loose our ability to *choose* our provider agency? Will we loose the only agency which provides the services which meet Christopher & Matthew's needs? Then what?

People with disabilities, families, agencies, communities and Montana Legislators—we're a big team! We're all together in this world through God's design--it was given to us. Thank you for your time, consideration and service to Montana.

Respectfully,

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