

October 3, 2017

Dear Governor Bulluck and Montana State Legislators,

This letter, I write to you as a provider of services to individuals with special needs as well as other people with employment barriers. Currently I serve in the capacity of a Career Enhancement Coordinator for Quality Life Concepts. As a provider, I have brought with me a few of the individuals we have served in job placement. Along with them, I have acquired testimonies in written form to share with you from these and other consumers. It would be much appreciated if you would keep an open mind as you read these and allow yourself to experience the emotion behind their story. Some of these letters, as I read them myself, seemed to be very well thought out and detailed in their explanation of how this would affect them. Some of their details include the story of where they have been and what it took to get to where they are today. Several share how they would have been affected had they not had this service. Most of these letters have a passionate emphasis behind them, with a few that may seem more extreme than others. All of them address their concerns should these services be cut too extensively. After all, anything less than fair would be unethical.

I understand the concept of a budget as do many of our clients. One particular client shared his concerns with the simplest of words. It is an issue most of us face when it comes to knowing which bills take priority. The greatest thought I could offer would be to remember that you are debating over peoples' lives. The very lives of those who, regardless of party, race, gender, or any other status you wish to consider made the choice to vote for you to represent them and their basic needs. No material item can have so much of an impact as that of how a person will be able to survive without the assistance of others or in the case of those with employment barriers, an income.

If we are a country who values the teachings of Christ, then allow me to emphasize a core belief, "do unto others as you would have done to you." And for those who are not led in this way, there is the first precept of "first, do no harm." We all have a story, and every one of us has at some time, needed a helping hand. It is a far more ethical stand to assure that our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors are cared for to the degree that this "helping hand" is returned (a hundred fold, if in nothing more than gratitude). Some folks require more assistance and this is where providers bridge the gap of assuring those who need help, receive it. Service providers are the ones who step in to provide the care and assistance that are available to our community. We have regulations to follow just as well as you when it comes to the balancing act we are faced with. This is not a letter to tell you what I think you should do. Rather, it is one to inform you of the consequences of some of these cuts and remind you of the benefits of the services that are available to our citizens.

It's all about being able to have control over our own fate and having a job, a career, an ability to make a living and earn what is rightfully ours. This is the very foundation of what state programs such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Extended Employment were meant to provide. It is because of these

**Legislative Finance Committee**  
**Oct. 4, 2017**  
**Exhibit 27**

October 3, 2017

Dear Legislators,

My name is Diana Groce. I have mental illnesses and that has stopped me from getting a job more than once. Many times I tried to get a job for many years at the hospital in Conrad. They wouldn't hire me. I went through Vocational Rehabilitation. They paid for my CNA training; bought me clothes, paid for my insurance, tuned up my truck, and paid for my gas. I asked Voc. Rehab. to not tell PMC extended care who they were hiring, because they wouldn't hire me. They did as I asked and I was hired. PMC found out what an awesome employee they had in me. I don't know why everyone wants to cut services for the mentally ill. We are people too. We have rights just like everyone else but it seems people try to take that away from us. Don't shut the door on mentally ill people; we need the services more than others. PLEASE DON'T TAKE SERVICES AWAY FROM US. DON'T SHUT US OUT....WE NEED YOU IN ORDER TO PROSPER IN LIFE... THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

Diana Groce  
209 S. Delaware St.  
Conrad, MT 59425  
406-271-2045

“If you drive a Prius, you are Gay!” Yes you read that correctly, if you drive a Prius, you are gay. What, you wonder, does that have to do with a financial hearing about Vocational Rehabilitation?

I married a man that has two children. One of them has Asperger’s. Once “Aspies” fixate on a “thing” it is the truth. Jeff Dunham, a comedian, stated in one of his skits that if you drive a Prius, you are gay. I heard her conviction that this was true and knew, KNEW that her life would forever be a struggle. The second concern, “I have Social Security so I don’t ever have to get a job.” My new daughter would say things in public that I would not even whisper in my own home. No topic was sacred. All of it was repeated and loudly.

Enter Vocational Rehabilitation. VR assigns job coaches to work with individuals. They coach them on potential interview questions and how to answer them, guide them to use appropriate interview clothing, hygiene, assist with answering assessments and in general, helping them overcome barriers so that they might be successful. Going to the job interview is a nightmare for people with disabilities. Once on the job and trained, people with disabilities are known to be more dependable, reliable, and dedicated employees. They are happy to be working the most menial task and take pride in the job they do. My daughter is successful if she has someone to help her learn the ropes, guide her through the communication process, then step back because the job will be done and done right, every time. That is a trait that can be a positive or a negative. Once it is in their head, it is the way it must be every time. An asset with cleaning and prepping, a drawback if you own a Prius!

Vocational Rehabilitation started sending her to conferences not only to learn about disabilities and her rights, but worked with her so that she became a paid presenter. Her confidence is soaring and she stops to think about what she says before she blurts something out, *sometimes*. She now talks about her future job and how she is going to do different things. Things that I did not think were possible for her. She is living on her own, paying her own bills, budgeting and “adulting.” Because she went through it, she has a little “troupe” of followers that she helps with the process; how to dress, how to do resumes, how to answer questions and anything else she thinks is helpful. Not all of it is right, but she is growing and learning.

She will not need Vocational Rehabilitation forever and that is the goal of everyone. Give a little assistance then stand back and watch them fly. As for the expert, Jeff Dunham, it took me two hours to teach her that people who drive Prius’s were environmentally friendly, that other people can drive them, and even Jeff Dunham has one. I had to focus on teaching her to look up the information herself, to not believe everything, and to not repeat things. She has taken “do your research”, her learning through Voc. Rehab., and applied herself in life. She has goals, she has a future, she has earning power.

Her final response? “Prius are still ugly!”

Anna Skinner  
726 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, Great Falls, MT 59404  
406-231-4409

October 3, 2017

Dear Legislators,

Hello, my name is Jason J Skinner, I am the father to Malia Skinner. Allow me to share my daughter with you. When Malia was almost 3 yrs. old, she was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. However on the high functioning side, she still had and continues with, developmental delays and is socially awkward at age 19. Because of this, it has been difficult for Malia to stay gainfully employed. Therefore she has sought to further her education in the hopes that she will be able to find a job where she works alone or can be self-employed. It is Malia's ambition to become a graphic designer. However, this will be EXTREMELY difficult if these cuts are made. Malia is a gentle soul and very driven, she attends Autism awareness conferences when she makes speeches and is enjoyed by those she is with. Without the help and support provided by Voc. Rehab., Malia will not be able to reach her goals of graduating college, having a career and providing for her family. May I say, the cuts you are proposing.....ARE WRONG!!! You will be cutting the legs out from, not only my daughter, but of those who are the most helpless. I implore only one thing and that is to DO THE RIGHT THING!!!

Jason J. Skinner  
726 4<sup>th</sup> Ave S  
Great Falls Mt 59405  
406-836-2715

Hi my name is Malia Skinner and I am a client of Vocational Rehabilitation. I'm also a person with disabilities and I get services from Voc. Rehab. I have Asperger's syndrome; it is a mild form of Autism, and it has affected me with getting and keeping a job which is why I'm now in Voc. Rehab. Asperger's means I'm socially awkward. I have a tough time communicating with some social cues that a normal person could pick up, but I don't realize that till a little bit later. I have lost 3 to 4 jobs because of my social awkwardness. For example, I lost my job at McDonalds because I said something to a customer that got miscommunicated and caused my termination.

I am a good worker. I know how to get the job done. I get the routine down really well. I just need help with social communications when it comes to a job. Assessments are something I need help with and sometimes help with applications and resume's.

Voc. Rehab. is helping me with getting a college career so I can get a better job that works with my interest and disabilities. The amazing benefits I get for using Vocational Rehabilitation are living on my own, doing well in college now, and I would love to eventually become a Graphic Designer.

I wouldn't be going to college, living on my own, and getting and keeping a job without the help from Voc. Rehab. As of now, I'm living on my own, paying my own bills, soon to be married, and I live successfully on my own thanks to Voc. Rehab.

Voc. Rehab. even helped my fiancé, Joshua Mele, get a job at Walmart. He graduated his learning courses called Pathways for Walmart. He is no longer with Voc. Rehab. because he is doing very well at Walmart and the best part is no complaints from any manager! He got a dollar raise which will help out with bills and we can set aside money for our wedding and honeymoon.

I don't want Voc. Rehab. to go away because then I'll need major help with finding a job, interview skills, assessments, and dressing for the job. I will need help communicating once I get the job, until I know what I'm doing.

Once my College is done, and I have a successful paying job and doing well in that job, I won't need Voc. Rehab. anymore. My future goals are to buy a house, become a mother of hopefully just 2 kids, and go on amazing vacations.

Thank you for your time and patience in listening to what I have to say about my benefits with Voc. Rehab.

Malia Skinner  
2419 6<sup>th</sup> Ave N,  
Great Falls, MT, 59401  
406-403-8277

October 3, 2017

A life experience shared:

Ryan Tracey  
527 15<sup>th</sup> Street South  
Great Falls, Montana 59405  
(406) 750-3195

**“The amount of money I am making on disability is not enough. I don’t need a lot more, just a little bit. My medication cost is just like “Wheew” so I can’t make a lot or I lose my Medicaid. Sometimes I need to dip into my food amount to buy cleaning supplies. I can do it but it would be nice to eat a little healthier considering my medical conditions. I need help. Trying to get a job is like going uphill through an avalanche. It just seems like it is impossible, I have been at this for so long.”**

These are the words of my newest client we just started serving. A choice between food and cleaning supplies. Not, “Can I afford a Starbucks this week?” Food, a basic essential in life. We look at numbers and do not realize it affects people. A budget is impersonal; it does not have a face, a story, a choice between food and something else that is needed. Yes you can cut the budget due to money so let’s talk money.

Everyone that works pays taxes back to the government. Everyone that has “extra” money spends it in our stores. More money being spent means more businesses that are interested in moving here, thus more taxes! With more businesses moving here, we need more workers. Unfortunately the trend right now is that our young people are moving away from Montana due to lack of jobs. No new businesses are moving in due to lack of workers. It is a harsh cycle with no end in sight. Businesses in Great Falls and throughout the state are complaining about lack of workers.

The solution for both problems is in your hands now. The budget needs income. We have people who want to work but do not have the skills to work. They may have a physical, mental or social disability. They may have anxiety and sitting down to work on an application is terrifying but the work ethic is phenomenal. Yes the start up cost is high, but as they are learning, they are working! Their Social Security payments are going down, their income is going up, and they are paying taxes. They are getting off their couch and moving while at work. The benefits to moving mean lower medical bills that are paid, again, by Medicaid.

Davey Simpson  
433 52<sup>nd</sup> Street South  
Great Falls, MT 59401  
406-899-2177

I wanted a job so I had a purpose. My whole family is in the medical field and this has been my dream for a long time. I have been told that I could NEVER work in the medical field. I desperately wanted something that I could help people and feel like I am making a difference. I have fragile X which means that I can break bones easily. I also have seizures and multiple medical issues. It seemed like an impossible task to find something that I could do. I had to have a specific kind of job where I could help people but still be personally safe. Vocational Rehabilitation took a chance on me and let me try out being a Resident Assistant under the Job Related Training. I did my training and loved the job. Because I did so many hours there, they could see that I did a good job; the residents loved me and asked that I be hired. They hired me as a resident's assistant!

My favorite part of the job is working with the residents, talking with them, dressing them, or serving them food. It is very satisfying feeling to help someone at the end of the day. Even if it is something little, I did something that helped someone else. My work place understands that sometimes I have medical issues and because of this, I have built a relationship with them

It's helpful to have services as, I had help with the interview process and accommodations for my job. It helped prepare me for my job, like a job shadow. Going through VR helped me choose something that I liked to do.

The money I earned lets me do more things that I want to do for fun. I can take my friends out for coffee or lunch. I was able to pick up a hobby. I'm spending my money in the community, thus supporting others. I am also paying taxes and my Social Security payments that I receive are going down.

Please don't cut this program. It's very helpful and much needed. For people with disabilities, it helps them get jobs that they can do, they love and they can be safe.

My Employment  
Resident Assistant  
Golden Eagle Plaza Senior Living  
1615 9th St S, Great Falls, MT 59405  
**Phone:** (406) 268-0100

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

I have always had a difficult time getting jobs throughout my life due to my disability (epilepsy). I also have trouble processing what I am thinking and I am slow to speak. My physical ability to walk and do other physical activities is slower than most people. Because of people's discrimination and or judgement towards my developmental delay and or the companies/businesses being afraid of me possibly having seizures on the job many are very reluctant to hire me. However, there were those who did take the risk and found that I was a good, hard and qualified worker despite the concerns about my seizures. As I married and raised a family, I made a name for myself in the school system by volunteering and was able to get a paid job with the school district. After my oldest child graduated from school, my position was cut as a teacher's aide. I had worked nine years with the school district. I really enjoyed working with special needs children, because I can relate to and understand them. After my job ended a couple years past, I heard that the school was hiring again. I tried to get back on there, but they had already hired other people. Different openings came up from time to time that I applied for. I tried to get a couple other jobs in Conrad the community that was in my field of expertise, but they did not hire me either.

My kids are now in college and bills were starting to stack up. I really needed to help my husband out because his paycheck was not enough to cover all our bills, plus now all the college debt. I found a part time job that my husband and I thought would be perfect for me. Everything seemed to go well at the time. Then, the job backfired as I could not keep up with the pressures of the job due to my disability and my world started to fall apart again. I put my applications out throughout Conrad and the Great Falls area and no one was interested in hiring me. This entire situation from my previous job had also shattered all that I had worked so hard to build up, the person who I have become. It took a year of wise mentoring and encouragement from my husband and friends to help me rebuild and get my life re-established. One wise and close friend told my husband and me about a place they had taken their daughter to, to find help with her college classes and getting a job. This is when I learned about Vocational Rehab.

My husband and I made an appointment to go and meet the advisor for Vocational Rehab. On our first visit we were so shocked by what the services could offer. I went in for a second consultation visit with my husband. On March of 2016 I signed the contract and agreements. My advisor and I started out by discussing the Social Security avenue verses getting a job. My advisor suggested that I do a little researching on my own with these two options. He gave me a specific name of some Social Security Disability professionals through disability program who I could talk with and to help me figure out if this would be the right direction for me to go in. After some research and deliberating I found that I was not quite qualified for S.S.D.I.

I kept in close contact with my Vocational Rehab advisor all the while. He suggested to me and my husband that I should consider looking for a job and get the credits I need. I will need them for down the road when I can be eligible for S.S.D.I. My advisor hooked me up with a job coach from Quality Life Concepts on July 2016.

I met with the job coach, he knows his job! My husband and I were amazed at how much we did not know about searching for jobs. My coach took all my job history and volunteering and all my classes and learning I have been involved with over the years and summed it up into a shocking resume'. Even the negative he was able to help me turn into a positive and it made me feel good about myself and that I wanted to go out and find a job. Whenever we met to see how



physical and mental support. Vocational Rehab is a well needed program. They help more than the special needs.

Vocational Rehab supports the family as well. They are there to make the person a stronger, more confident, positive, influence in their community as well as strengthening their walk with their family and circle of friends and co-workers and those who come into acquaintance with them.

Without programs like Vocational Rehab, where would people be who try hard to make a life for themselves, but do not know how to? Or, people with disabilities, depression or anxiety, money problems or abuse problems, of all and any kinds? How about people who just have never been taught and need some classes? Those people who have been down and out and really want to make a new start in life? Vocational Rehab can help so many people from all kinds of walks of life. They make such a positive impact and strive to reach the individual goals of each person. The topping on the cake is that Vocational Rehab goes above and beyond to make sure the client and their family is satisfied.

I strongly urge you, the legislators, to keep the Vocational Rehab program up and running strong. Not only will you be hurting those who are in need of help and their families, but you will also be destroying the jobs of these wonderful people who care and want to help others and their families. Vocational Rehabilitation has allowed a segment of Montana's disabled adult community to be active, productive members of the Montana communities in which they live.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Kari Brauer  
411 S. Wisconsin  
Conrad, MT 59425  
406-271-3733

My Employment  
Teacher's Aide-Special Education  
Conrad Public Schools  
308 S. Illinois  
Conrad, MT 59425  
406-278-3285

October 2, 2017

Dear Montana State Legislators and Governor Steve Bullock,

We received this letter from one of our client's parents in regard to the services they have been fortunate to have for him. I have listed their information below.

Thank you,

Doug McElroy  
Career Enhancement Coordinator  
Quality Life Concepts  
406-452-9531 ext. 272

Client Name: Damien Muller  
Guardian: Mary Muller  
Address: 1810 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. S. Great Falls, MT  
Phone: 406-217-7421

Hi, I am writing this letter to let you know how much the programs you <sup>want to</sup> ~~want to~~ cut; VO-Retab, QIC, SST, medical expenses and transportation mean to my son. My son is 21 years old, whom we have Guardianship of. Our son has Drussbarbil polay which he had since birth which left him with a speech impediment and <sup>IQ of a 3rd grade</sup> generalized convulsive seizures starting when he was 15 in year 2011, his meds alone cost \$1925<sup>00</sup> per month. My husband and my income is \$2185<sup>00</sup> per month. Without these programs my son would not be living today as he would not have the people and tools to keep him going and my husband and I would not have been able to afford the care he received, and needed. The kids in our neighborhood did not like to

be around him as they  
 could not understand his  
 speech and he could not  
 use his hand like  
 them so they would not  
 want him around them.  
 These programs gave him  
 over the years, how to  
 strengthen his hands and fingers  
 to be able to do things the other  
 kids can. With his speech  
 to work around the palsy in his  
 face to form words to have  
 them understand him.  
 It was also good to be  
 around other kids and not  
 be shy. His 1<sup>st</sup> words  
 came when he was 5 years  
 old and they were one word  
 sentences. He did a lot of  
 pointing at things he  
 need. He did learn how  
 to sign language before he  
 learned to speak in complete  
 sentences. He now enjoys being  
 around people and has a lot

of fun. He can function well with the help of cues and repetitive actions of doing things.

To say he is a happy 21 year old who has fun play and doing things with others no matter how old they maybe. He also enjoys being around his nephews who are 5 + 6 years old and the enjoy being around him. At times he is shy but when he get to know you, he then become another person. Please do not cut these programs as I think it would be cutting the life of the people that need this extra help.

Sincerely

A special person

October 3, 2017

We received this letter from one of our Vocational Rehabilitation/Extended Employment clients. Listed below is her employment information.

Thank you,

Doug McElroy  
Career Enhancement Coordinator  
Quality Life Concepts  
406-452-9531

Client: Brenda Croft

Employer: Big Sky Bus Lines  
Address: 2920 15<sup>th</sup> St Black Eagle, MT 59414  
Phone: 406-454-1283

My name is Brenda and I'm  
writing this letter on behalf  
for Vocational rehab quality life  
concepts. Vocational rehab turned  
my life around I am on disability  
and if it hadn't been for  
them I wouldn't be where I'm  
at today they helped <sup>me</sup> believe  
in myself that I can work  
and keep my disability they  
bought inter vein clothes for  
me they helped fix my  
car so I could come and  
go back and forth to work they  
set me up with quality life  
concepts. And a job coach  
who helped me get a job  
the job coach checked up on  
me to make sure I was doing  
great at my job so please  
don't cut these programs  
so they can continue helping  
the disabled and those who have  
disabilities helping them succeed  
and soar & excel in their job  
I've been blessed with a job with →

Big Sky Bus lines as Bus Aide  
for Special needs I love my  
Job Thanks to Voc-Rehab so  
please keep them in mind  
there's a lot of disabled and people  
with different kinds of disabilities  
who need Voc Rehab helping  
them getting a Job that they are  
worthy and able to hold down  
a Job which makes a difference  
in their life

Thank you

Brenda Croft  
1920 2nd Ave North  
Great Falls Mt 59401