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Kathy Cooper

From: Heather Jones <heatherj787@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, December 16, 2016 8:45 AM
To: IRRC
Subject: Pre-Vocational Day Program Funding

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To Whom It May Concern:

I completely and fully stand against The Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) plan to alter pre-vocational day programs- DHS Regulation 14-540. Sheltered workshops such as Associated Production Services (APS) would be forced to close and put so many people with special needs out of work. If these workshops don't meet the 75% community based requirement, they will lose their funding. It is outrageous to suggest that people with special needs only work 25% of the time? Do you work only 25% of the time? Would you be happy if someone told you that you could only receive a pay check for 25% of the work week? People with disabilities want a choice in their life and their work. This law takes away their choice.

My sister, Carlie Jones, is 25 years old and works at Associated Production Services, Inc. (APS), a work shelter program. Carlie loves her job and it fulfills a desire in her to be seen as "just like the rest of her family". Working and earning a pay check allows Carlie to be and feel like she is doing her part to contribute to society. Monday through Friday Carlie gets up and goes to work five days per week, just like the rest of her family. Taking away her choice to work 100% of the time and reducing it to 25% takes away her ability to do real work and earn a real paycheck.

My sister, Carlie is very quiet. Carlie has had horrifying experiences of being lost in the community. Carlie is happy to work in a work-shelter program with the same co-workers, bosses and environment every single day. She is comfortable and can work hard because she is confident in her supervisors and herself. Taking her out of this environment will lead to a plummet in her self-confidence and her experience of working. Carlie does no less than six sports and activities throughout the year, in which she is out and about in the community. My sister and I workout together, in the community, every week, we go out to dinner or to the movies or a variety of other activities. My sister is out in the community almost every single day, at the discretion of our family, not a law. I find it appalling that someone wants to dictate her to reduce her work week by 75%, so that she is only working 25% of the time. This is a discrimination against persons with intellectual disabilities and takes away any voice that they have.

Carlie is proud to earn a full paycheck each and every week so that she is able to do simple things that we may take for granted, but she doesn't. Carlie is able to purchase Christmas and birthday presents for her loved ones. Carlie is able to pay for private skating lessons every week, because that is her favorite sport. Carlie can treat her friends to a movie with her paycheck, and socialize in the community, with her friends and family, not because of a law mandating it.

APS, which has provided gainful employment for her and her coworkers may soon disappear. This is unacceptable. APS, a workshop, is safer than outside employment, providing protection and supervision of adults with disabilities. *APS is not as demanding as community employment and provides work which is comparable to a person's capabilities.* APS provides a social environment and opportunities for friendship among their peers. Structure and routine provide consistency, an important benefit in any individual's life.

APS and most sheltered workshops rely on government funding. Without an exception to this DHS, ODP Pennsylvania Law to provide 75% community integration, APS and work shelter programs will lose their funding and be forced to close.

The ODP Mission states: The mission of the Office of Developmental Programs is to support Pennsylvanians with developmental disabilities to achieve greater independence, CHOICE and opportunity in their lives. Where is my sister's choice? ODP should not be able to dictate Carlie's CHOICE. This law takes away any decisions that Carlie presently has. It is Carlie's choice to remain working at APS, a sheltered workshop.

Community-based services are not a one-size-fits-all solution and Pennsylvania should recognize this by offering both options of community employment or work sheltered employment. Employment is one of life's major occupations. If sheltered workshops are eliminated, those individual who are not qualified, or who do not wish to participate in community based employment will be left with no options for employment. Even individuals who are qualified for community based employment will have a hard time securing and maintaining employment during economic downturns, leading to less stability in their lives. Eliminating sheltered workshops will decrease the options for many adults with intellectual disabilities.

The ODP says that they're not closing sheltered workshops, but by withholding funding, these work shelter programs will not be able to exist. In 2008, Maine phased out the use of sheltered workshops. Presently 2/3rds of those previously employed in workshops are no longer employed and those who are working earn less per week because of the reduction in the number of hours worked. In Washington State only 17% of people with intellectual disabilities have found work in the community. THIS IS A DISGRACE! If a person with developmental disabilities has not been able to find employment after 1 year, they become eligible for publicly-funded RECREATIONAL activities instead. Is this what Pennsylvania wants for its people with intellectual disabilities? Pennsylvania needs to stand up and maintain the rights and choices of work for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Respectfully,

Heather Jones

1803 Jill Road Willow Grove, PA 19090

215-284-0392