

Introduction and Testimony

First and foremost, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the hard and devastating impact that cuts to Care Management will have on my son, my family and the other 110,000 individuals and their families, that are under OPWDD's care. My name is Christina Silva-Soto, and my 6 1/2-year-old son Oliver is diagnosed with Autism, ADHD and an AKT 3 deletion causing an intellectual disability. Oliver has been under the OPWDD umbrella for over 2 years and the supports and services he has been receiving have been nothing short of life changing for him and our family.

While I considered myself to be a very "aware" parent, nothing can ever prepare you for the fight you will have day in and day out to get the basic supports and services your developmentally disabled child will need. When I started this journey with my son, I would never have imagined the challenges would start prior to his 1st birthday and continue for the rest of our lives.

Care Management is the glue that holds my son's circle of support together. Without Care Management my son would not be able to access Home and Community Based Services. The services, advocacy and consistency of the Care Manager allow Oliver to experience growth, socialization, and integration within his community. Our Care Manager ensures his Life Plan is updated and accurate, she supports us during his IEP meeting at school and makes sure he is OK (receiving the services and supports needed to achieve academic success). Throughout this pandemic, Oliver's Care Manager would check in weekly to see if we needed anything. Yes, that seems very simple to say, but it is EVERYTHING. Our Care Manager is not only a key element in completing the person-centered services for Oliver, but she is also the chain that keeps Oliver's life together.

The fact that I know someone is invested in my son as much as I am, is such a layer of comfort and support I never thought would be possible. This is the safety net that holds us all together. If it is possible for them to make such a drastic decision to cut this dire funding without even a discussion, can we expect them to start cutting all funding and services? What will the future be for our most vulnerable population? These cuts to Care Management will not only effect Care Management, but ALL OPWDD Waiver Services. A 16.2% cut last year was hard to accept, but an additional 23% again this year. What happened to OPWDD vowing Person-Centered Care Management? There has been no discussion, no ability to provide mutual solutions. The lack of transparency is frightening considering our taxpayer money is funding OPWDD.

In the process of advocating hard for my son, I have found myself advocating for others who do not have as strong a voice as I do. Due to my own plight trying to navigate the OPWDD Waiver process, two years ago, I joined Tri-County Care to make a difference and assist families in need. I wanted the opportunity to reach out and educate the families that desperately needed these imperative services. I hit the ground running and have not stopped since. Day in and day out I speak to families regarding their loved ones and the despair in their voices only cements the fact that more needs to be done and not taken away. In Intake, I have had cases that I have assisted with acquiring insurance and having to have them assigned a Care Manager immediately due to lack of financial resources, no shelter and food insecurity. Not all individuals have families to assist them or even a place to lay their head at night. The Care Manager is EVERYTHING to these individuals. I chair numerous support groups for individuals and parents and the continuous thread in our discussions- what does the future look like for our children and loved ones with special needs? Who will support my child if I am not here? So, I stand before you today to please consider how these detrimental cuts will affect Oliver, the 110,000 vulnerable DD individuals and their families that are supported day in and day out by Care Management.

Thank you for your time.

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