

**Michigan Mental Health and Wellness Commission
Public Hearing Testimony
September 6, 2013**

What is the Future for Adults with Intellectual Disability?

Testimony
of
Jo Ann Wilton, Mother/Advocate

My name is Jo Ann Wilton. Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I have an adult son, Robert, who is intellectually impaired. I have been an advocated on behalf of developmentally disabled people for over 35 years.

People with intellectual disability deserve the dignity and respect as all others in the community.

Parents of younger children with intellectual disability are now advocating for services that have been restricted, totally denied or altogether stopped.

We, the parents of older persons with intellectual disability worry what will happen after we are gone. The quote from older parents of years ago is, sadly, still relevant, "Can't die yet, not everything is in place." Years ago an elderly parent suddenly lost her son. When my husband and I saw her a few weeks after he had died, she said to us, "I know where Richard is, now I can die."

My son and two housemates have rented a house in Marysville since March 2001. They split

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expenses (rent, food, utilities) and have a good life in the community. They have paid supports on the weekend and while they are home from their weekday activities and jobs. The first month Robert lived in his home, we noticed a distinct maturity. He became more vocal...initiating conversation and expressing his views, likes and dislikes. The men know and understand control over their lives. They share chores and grocery shopping; They have the power to hire and fire their staff and they have fired staff.

My son and his housemates have good, interesting lives. I strongly feel that others should live in their own homes with paid supports if they so choose; currently, St. Clair County Community Mental Health no longer supports or funds paid supports for those wanting to live in their own homes stating it was too costly. I am told St. Clair County has a housing waiting list for persons with developmental disability. Foster care homes are closing because owners are growing older and no one wants to run the foster home. Even if it was a "wash" compared to other living arrangements, these men and others who live in their own homes have a life...a good life they have fully embraced.

So, if we have no beds in group homes and a shortage of foster care homes, what do aging parents do? what do younger parents do in planning futures for their disabled children? Those whose children have come from the institutional setting and those whose children live

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in their own homes have a real concern that one day the institutions will return; maybe not in the large population sense, but six-bed group homes are an indication that it could head in that direction. It is a dreadful thought of we the older parents.

Night life for the adult developmentally disabled person is gone in St. Clair County; no after hours are authorized. We hear the comment that people were going out five times a week and that is too much. Yes, even I don't go out five times a week. However, I do believe that people should have the choice of when and where they participate in night life, not just weekdays at a program. They need a natural social environment. As parents and caregivers, we feel the night life should be re-instated.

Microenterprises for those wanting their own businesses have been cut back. At first they were eliminated; then through some negotiation, they were re-instated with some hours cut. Micro-Enterprises are cited in the Medicaid law; why is it so difficult to have this program? I am not an unreasonable person. Persons with disability should have an equal chance at services as everyone else. They are equal to everyone and should be treated with fairness, dignity and respect and be considered part of the "greater good".

Again, thank you for allowing me to give this testimony.

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