

I am writing to you to make you aware of the termination of a program under the Department of Human Services in the Developmental Disabilities Budget, the Experienced Parent program. This program allows for the hiring of parents with lived experience of having a child who receives our Part C Early Intervention services (birth to 3). Experienced parents have been in existence for close to 25 years working in conjunction with the North Dakota Early Intervention system.

This loss of the Experienced Parent program is not showing up in the detail from the Department and is not reflected on the Savings Plan. The reason we were given is that: the funds used for it have been repurposed for direct services. In the 2017 session, this also happened, and advocates worked with legislators to get \$100,000 of state general funds reinstated and \$160,000 of the federal Part C grant dedicated to the program.

I gave testimony then as well, with my baby daughter in the room (and on my hip at one point), reminding representatives that North Dakota takes great pride in the claims to be "pro-life" while a woman is pregnant, yet limits the support she and her child receive once that child is born. It is confusing and disheartening, for the government of North Dakota to claim it cares for children and families as there is active voting to reduce budgets that directly support them. Having a child with a disability teaches you a lot of things, but after learning how to love everyone, it's how to budget, because therapy is expensive. I know you can find the money for these positions. I would not be where I am today, finding the resources and specialists necessary for my daughter to thrive if it were not for the help I received from the Experienced Parent program. The support of the parents who came before me, walking this path and know who to reach out to and how to ask questions to make sure my daughter receives the care that she needs has been invaluable. They are there for you on a personal level, walking with you hand in hand, leading the way all while reminding you that it will be okay; and when it's not, that your family will be okay.

I support the Experienced Parent program whole-heartedly. Think of the statistics of childhood disabilities, and sleep better knowing that when someone in your family needs them, they will be there.

We would like the funding fully restored. Because we have fought this battle as little as 4 years ago, we are open to what other avenues are available to get this funding out to be used ASAP.

Thank you for your attention.

Layla Ligutom