



February 16, 2011

Testimony of Kimberly Ann Brusatori, parent of a severely disabled adult, before the Texas State House of Representatives Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee on February 16, 2011 regarding Article II of HB1 (House proposed budget).

Good Afternoon. My name is Kim Brusatori. I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I am the mother of Kyle who is a 28 year old who has developmental disabilities. He was born and raised in Texas. He has a significant seizure disorder, is moderate to severe MR and he is non verbal. Our family waited on the HCS/CLASS Medicaid Waiver list for over eight years for services for our son. We did not find out about HCS waiver services until he was 14 years old. No one told us that the services existed. Neither his school nor his doctors. You would be really amazed at the number of people who are not aware of services that are available in this State. I can assure you that the numbers you have in front of you are only a small part of what the true need is.

Secondly I am the Founder and CEO of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit HCS Medicaid Waiver Program in Kingwood, Texas – Village Learning & Achievement Center -- where we serve over 230 children and adults with disabilities. When my son was 18 years old and facing graduation I chose to try and make a difference for him and others. I have spent the last ten years building a quality program for our community. I didn't wait for someone to take care of what I needed- I along with many other parents in our community went out to try and solve our own problems and issues and develop the programs and services that we needed. Every parent that I know or that I have worked with all strongly believe that serving our children in their community, where they grew up, is the only viable option. We believe in the de-institutionalizing of our State Supported Living Centers and bringing services into our own communities where we can watch over our children as long as we can to make sure they are being taken care of without the fear of abuse and neglect.

Thirdly, I am honored to represent a coalition of Harris County HCS Providers who have joined together to try and make a difference in the decisions that you have before you. With all due respect we believe that we know how to run our businesses better than you. We are micromanaged, told how many staff to have, what to pay them, we are subjected to recoupment if we somehow forget to sign a piece of paper, we are told we have to serve every person who walks through our doors- even the most difficult behaviors and dually diagnosed individuals, we are paid one level of need less than what an individual's true level is, and well honestly the list could go on. And for doing all of this we sit here today facing most likely budget cuts that without a doubt will put the majority of us out of business.

I would like to paint a scenario for you of what I believe the results of any reductions to Medicaid Waiver Services will be:

1. Parents will not have a day program available to them- therefore one of them will have to stay home to care for their child. There are no private day care centers that will take care of adults with mental retardation.
2. The divorce rate will increase from what is already higher than average because the stress of having to raise and care for a child will most likely be the straw that breaks the camel's back with many marriages. Typical divorce rates are 50%- it is 80% for parents with children with special need. You add on one more burden and you will see the divorce rate climb even higher.
3. These single mothers now raising their children will go on welfare to help support themselves and their child. They won't have a lot of options because what do they do with their child? They certainly can't care for them when they can't work.
4. You will find an increase in the need for slots in state supported living centers because when these parents divorce, get sick or can't care for their child anymore the only options that will be available to them is to place their child there.
5. The state supported living centers population will grow. As I hope all of you are aware state supported living centers costs are three times higher to serve an individual as do HCS Medicaid Waiver Programs. HCS providers are currently serving 18,000 consumers in the state at a cost of \$633,000,000. SSLC are serving 4200 individuals at a cost of \$933,000,000. Hmmm....\$300,000,000 more to serve

13,800 less people. As you see it is significantly higher to serve individuals in SSLCs. They are also well known for rampant abuse and neglect. You will be subjecting people like the ones you see here today to atrocities that many of us do not want to stop and contemplate.

6. You have heard of Autism. Autism affects one in every 110 births in our nation. It is an epidemic larger than anything we have ever seen before. With an epidemic of this size are you sure you want to be dismantling a care system which is very cost effective and is designed to help these families and individuals?

7. Last June our HCS budget was cut \$25,000 per month due to the reorganization of case management and re-appropriation of service funding and another \$8,000 the first of this month when the state enacted a 2% budget cut- for a total of \$33,000 per month loss in revenue over the last seven months. If you make any more cuts in September you will force me to rethink who I serve and why. I live in an affluent neighborhood. I could very easily turn to a private pay model. I would have to turn away single mothers, those clients who I serve who have no family, those families who could not afford to pay. I will not shut my doors – I have worked too hard for that over the last ten years. What I will do is not serve everyone in my own community. That was and would still be my goal- the philosophy of what we built our company on- but your cuts will force us to pick and choose.

I guess the most important question you all have to face is what is going to happen to those that I can no longer serve? Do you know?

I came today to speak because I felt I had to. I couldn't sit and not try to stand up for what I and so many others have worked for over the last ten years.

You as senators and legislators must look at ways to increase funding in this State. We need to look at using the rainy day fund, raising taxes, implementing gambling and looking at any other areas where we can make this deficit shared by all- not just on the backs of the poorest and neediest people in the state.

You need to consider shutting down state schools as ineffective and expensive alternatives to community based services, you need to reduce the costs of oversight by so many different agencies and you need to have experienced individuals who understand our very complicated business help you to make the best decisions as to how we should run our programs. We have assembled a group of the

most influential people in our industry and we offer to sit down to come up with viable solutions if you so desire. We would appreciate the opportunity to help you so that you in turn can do your job which is to help the people of the Great State of Texas.

I appreciate your time today. I hope over the next few months that you will spend time figuring out ways to raise money than to cut. If you decide to cut Medicaid Waiver Services I truly believe that you will be dismantling an already cost effective and well maintained system which will take years and years to rebuild.

My Motto which is shared by everyone in this room is- Ladies and Gentlemen- No More Cuts.