

Testimony for Public Hearing on Proposed Tax Increases
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I'd like to thank all of the legislators for making time today to hear our concerns. Let me start with my conclusion, which is that I support raising taxes if needed. But, I think we should look carefully at what "needed" means.

As background, I'll tell you that I'm the parent of two sons, both of whom carry the diagnoses of autism and intellectual disability. I am very interested in the DDS budget, which has been cut over and over during previous budget cycles and even further with rescissions (\$43 million in cuts since November 2012). Without going into too much detail, I'll say that my older son would be affected by the "no new grad funding" cut in the Governor's proposed budget, and my other son would be damaged by the 60% proposed cut to the DDS Voluntary Services Program (VSP) budget. We families are so grateful for the support of the I/DD Caucus, and the members of the Appropriations Committee who have heard our concerns and restored some of this funding in their proposed budget.

We hear from legislators that the resources needed to support our disabled population are significant, and that we must either (1) raise taxes to find the revenue to help them, or (2) lower the funding they're receiving (again!). I disagree. I look at the budget, which the Governor says is full of "tough but fair" cuts "for a Brighter Connecticut", and I see things like this:

- \$750,000,000 on bike trails (\$250M to build sidewalks and bike lanes in urban centers, \$250M to connect gaps in the statewide regional trail network, and \$250M to build a trail alongside the Merritt Parkway)
- \$5 million to subsidize a private air carrier (supposedly Aer Lingus?) to run transatlantic air flights out of Bradley Airport
- Baseball stadium — Raised Bill No. 1132 — adds a tax to admissions to fund the \$60 million loan taken out to build a new stadium for the Hartford Yard Goats, raising \$4.2M/year (after promises that the stadium would not cost CT taxpayer money)
- Political mailings — some legislators have recommended a two-mailings-per-year reduction (per candidate), for a savings of \$7M
- "Second Chance Society" -- On-the-job training and transition planning for rehabilitating prisoners (the Governor says "they deserve a second chance") — \$7.8M in FY2016, \$9.8M in FY2017
- \$761,181 in raises to the Board of Regents administrators

I like bike trails, but I think taking care of our disabled should take priority over these. I agree that prisoners should have second chances, but taking care of my sons — who did not choose to be born autistic — should be done before taking care of someone who did choose to commit a crime. I find the volume of political mailings to be an overwhelming annoyance, and an environmental

disaster. And let's not give \$5 million to a foreign air carrier instead of taking care of our American disabled citizens. There are undoubtedly more budget items like these, which may be beneficial, but which are lower priority than taking care of our citizens with disabilities.

In addition, before raising any taxes, we should vigorously pursue the \$19 million in savings available at Southbury Training School, which was identified by the families who found massive overtime and other waste.

So, I am in neither the "no new taxes" camp, nor am I in the "let's raise taxes to fund all of these ideas" camp. I'm in the "let's cut out the non-essentials on the spending side, and only then raise taxes as needed to fund our needs" camp.

If I can draw an analogy to a household budget – if my family were not making ends meet, one solution would be to just stop feeding the children so we could live within our income. Another solution would be to keep spending as it is and get another job to earn more money. Both of these strategies are flawed. I think the wisest solution is to first stop the daily latte at Starbucks, the Hawaii vacation, and the premium cable package, and then, when non-essentials have been removed from our spending, and if there is still a gap, go find more money. And, if we can take this exercise to the state level, maybe instead of needing the \$2 billion in taxes currently in the budget proposal, we'll only need \$1 billion. Or none. But if we do need that \$1 billion, I am most definitely in support of raising taxes to get it.

We recognize that the resources required by our disabled population are not small. We also know that the Appropriations Committee members have worked hard to set priorities. But we believe that there is more priority-setting that needs to be done, if we are to have that "Brighter Connecticut" that the Governor describes. Let's make sure that it's a Brighter Connecticut for our disabled community. Although raising taxes is not easy, not is it a popular choice, we are a state of great resources. Please support my family, and families like mine, who need your help to find the revenue to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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