

An Open Invitation to Families and Advocates of Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Fragmented, we are just whispers. United, we are a chorus.

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By Shawn Humberson, VOR Wyoming State Coordinator

My name is Shawn Humberson. I am a State Co-Coordinator for VOR and a Friends of Wyoming Life Resource Center (WLRC) Board member.

My profoundly disabled aunt has lived at the WLRC for the past seven years after spending the first 34 years of her life at home and receiving services from community programs. She was one of the first enrolled in the Medicaid Waiver Program. I am one of her co-guardians. I also work as a home trainer in a community program.

As you can see, I am deeply, personally and professionally, vested in Wyoming's intellectually and developmentally disabled (I/DD) population. From my perspective, our current and future DD population is at risk. The Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) is making critical changes across the board. These changes are in response to state legislation and new federal regulations. These changes are not necessarily in the best interests of the Developmentally Disabled.

Here in Wyoming, the DD has been fragmented into three segments: those living at home, those being served in community programs, and those who live at WLRC. Each segment, counter to each other, has been forced to grovel over funding and the quest for those rare dollars has caused dissention amongst the families of the I/DD population. While we're bickering over who deserves the funding, the Department of Health is making changes in services that affect the quality of life for our loved ones.

In a recent debate, gubernatorial candidate Cindy Hill made the statement that individuals with ID/DD can be served more cheaply at home. The fact is: not everyone can be served at home. The belief that all persons with I/DD are the same is akin to the idea that all people are the same. It simply is not true. Certainly it would be cheaper for the state but at what cost? The services in community programs and at the WLRC cannot be replicated at home.

While the State steps over a dollar to save a dime our families are being adversely affected. The State chose not to expand Medicaid; people are still waiting for services. This is not acceptable! Each citizen with I/DD has a right to quality of life and services tailored to their needs. Their families deserve peace of mind.

It is our responsibility as citizens of this State to care for our vulnerable citizens; children, the disabled, and the elderly. We are the voices of the developmentally disabled. **Fragmented, we are just whispers. United, we are a chorus.** I believe the time to unite as one community is past due. I invite parent groups, parents and guardians, and community program providers to join the VOR and Friends of WLRC in championing for individuals with I/DD in our State.

Respectfully,

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