
A Time for Unity and Understanding

In the months and years ahead, the disability community will be facing a drastic reduction in funding as a result of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Every state will see a different re-appropriation of funds to its safety net programs, including services to children, the elderly, and to the community individuals with I/DD and autism (ID/A).

It is our hope that these difficult times serve to bring I/D/A communities together, and that by joining together we can create a stronger voice, and help one another to find services and to cope through the problems that lie ahead.

VOR advocates for CHOICE. But what does that really mean? Choice means freedom—but it also means responsibility. The freedom to make our own decisions bears the responsibility to respect, understand, and support the decisions made by others, even when we might have chosen differently. Respect for differences and embracing diversity is, after all, central to the work we do as disability advocates. We, better than anyone, understand that each individual or family faces unique differences, has support needs, and has access to different options and resources. By actively supporting one another, even when our paths diverge, we leave no room for our shared adversaries to take advantage of division.

The decisions that individuals with ID/A and their families have to make are not easy. We try to make informed choices and we anguish over whether or not we have made the right decision. We live with the voices in our heads that say, “Have I made the right choice? Was this the best option?”. We appreciate support in making informed decisions from those who understand our situation. We balk at criticism from those who do not know us and don’t try to understand why we have chosen as we have.

Individuals who choose self-direction and families who decide to care for their loved ones in their own home have no easier course than families who choose group homes or ICF care for their loved ones. It takes courage and strength to put together a supported decision-making plan and to advocate for one’s own services on one’s own terms. It takes resolve and a multitude of personal sacrifices to accommodate a family member with ID/A at home. It takes compassion to apply for guardianship for a loved one who cannot make life-sustaining choices for themselves. And it is heartbreaking to decide that your loved one will lead a better life with professional supports rather than those the family can provide. While we celebrate one person’s opportunity to work in competitive, integrated employment, we must also celebrate someone who finds fulfillment in a sheltered workshop, or the joy that another individual experiences in their day program. VOR supports any and all meaningful daily activities, as long as they bring value to the lives of those who participate

There is no single solution to *anyone’s* life choices, whether there is ID/A involved or not. And no doubt, with the approaching drastic cuts in Medicaid, the choices we will have to make in the future will be even more challenging. But we as a community will benefit from understanding and supporting one another’s choices, whatever they may be, and in helping one another navigate the challenges that arise from the cuts to Medicaid funding that have been passed into law.