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Subject: public input

My name is Robin Carlson and my main role is a Direct Support Professional in helping people with disabilities live quality lives in our communities.

I would like to recommend that in any system change that direct support workers be asked directly what their understanding of the vision is for people with disabilities to be fully integrated into our communities and what major obstacles they encounter when trying to achieve this goal.

After all, direct support workers are the people who will be implementing all required and recommended actions to help people with disabilities get the respect and dignity of being recognized as citizens of their communities.

It is my experience that there is a major disconnect between the vision and mission of total integration and the policy, procedures and practices from service organizations to achieve these outcomes. For example, direct support workers are underpaid which can lead to high turnover, lack rigorous training to help discover the gifts and talents of the people they serve in order to move in ways that are meaningful, are being asked to be more focused on documentation for funding and take fewer risks due to liability than being creative and using natural resources and developing relationships with others in the community. Financial resources are too low at the ground level and people with disabilities and their staff are just wandering around our communities looking for "free" activities and sometimes just grouping together in public spaces (libraries, mall food courts, parks, bowling lanes, day centers where segregated, congregated activities take place in the name of learning how to cook or put puzzles together in the name of OT therapy). Staffing patterns of one staff to three "clients" are also prohibitive to person centered approaches.

The issues are huge and if not addressed people with disabilities will have a harder time having their humanity and great contributions acknowledged by the greater good of society. Being a direct support worker for 30 years I know that people with disabilities have the wisdom to make us all better people and that all means all.

Thank you.