

January 5, 2022

Good morning members of the finance and appropriations committee. My name is Kate Oppe and I am a resident of Chesterfield County.

I am here today to ask for your support of the DD System Rescue Plan and the need to be proactive in relieving the workforce crisis that affects children receiving waiver services. House and Senate patrons will be introducing language in the upcoming session that would enable parents like myself to be paid attendants for their children under the age of 18.

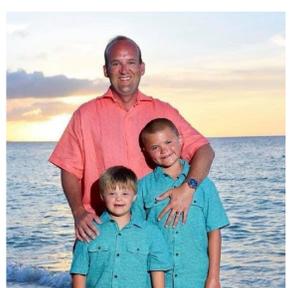
My son Hatch has Down Syndrome, Autism and a Speech Language impairment. Hatch has significant behaviors that not only endanger his life, but the lives of the people that love and care for him the most.

My son has been receiving waiver services since he was 3 weeks old and after being on Virginia's Medicaid waiver waitlist for 11 years, Hatch was awarded the community living waiver.

As an infant and toddler, we rarely had trouble finding personal attendant and respite care provides until his violent behaviors began to manifest around the age of 4. These behaviors include: punching, kicking, biting, pulling hair out, fracturing the eye socket of a 1:1, breaking doors, windows, electronics and punching holes in just about every wall in our house.

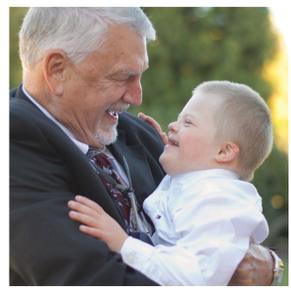
We have utilized every resource available to find a personal attendant for Hatch but let's be real, at \$11.81 an hour, would you sign up to be Hatch's personal attendant? We wouldn't dare leave him alone with anyone knowing that his personal attendant would likely be physically assaulted. We only wanted a third set of eyes so we could work.

Between September 2019 and March 2020, Hatch had to be picked up from school 83 times because of his behavior. I'm not sure how much sick and personal time you get but as a Special Education Transition Support Specialist in Chesterfield





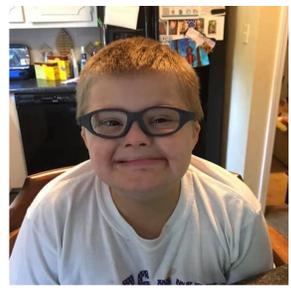
County, I had burned through my leave by mid-January. We decided as a family that I would resign from my job after 17 years in public education and take advantage of the flexibility that Appendix K was offering as our only other option would be to place Hatch in a Group Home.



Per DBHDS' website, the average pay rate for a Tier 2 Group Home is \$187 per day. That is \$68,255 per year. The annual cost to allow me to be his personal attendant is \$24,564. Utilizing Appendix K, I make just over 1/3 of what Virginia would pay a group home. Frankly, it makes no sense to me why Virginia would rather pay for Hatch to be in a Group Home away from his family costing exponentially more than what I receive if he were to stay with his family? This doesn't seem morally, ethically or fiscally responsible.



Professionally, I am over qualified to be his personal attendant with 17 years in education, 10 of which are special education, certified in adaptive curriculum, trained in ABA, crisis and de-escalation. Personally, I am his mother and an expert in all things Hatch related.



I know that there will come a time when I am no longer able to care for him, until that day, the Commonwealth of Virginia can save a tremendous amount of money by allowing me to be his personal attendant.



Your support of this bipartisan effort will help so many of Virginia's families just like mine.



I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity that you have provided me to share a small part of my family's story with you today.

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