

Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue that is near and dear to my heart. I am Susan Rzucidlo. I am the Executive Director of a non-profit organization, SPEAK Unlimited Inc., where we provide free advocacy services to families across the region. I came to the advocacy world because of my son Ben. Ben is now an adult, and one day he will be left without me here to speak for his needs and protect him as I have since he was born.

I'd like to share some of my background. My husband and I have 4 children. Our second son Ben was diagnosed with a severe form of autism when he was 2 yrs. 9 months old. It was later determined that he has a functional IQ in the mid to upper 30's range. Ben speaks at the level of a two year old. He can tell you what he wants to eat, that he wants to watch Country music videos or play a game on his iPad, and when he is tired of all of us he will say, "Sleep in the bed." Ben has many great qualities, but one of his worst qualities is that he is overly compliant. He will go anywhere with anyone, he will take off his clothes in public areas if asked to; he has no comprehension of personal danger. Ben will and has walked into the path of traffic and Ben will do what he is told to do. This all makes Ben a perfect victim and THAT, worries me more than just about anything else I've faced in our journey as a family of a person who lives with a disability.

For a number of years I have worked with an amazing group of advocates who fought to get an Adult Protective Services Law put in place in Pennsylvania. While I was thrilled to have the law passed, I was more than a little disappointed that funding didn't follow. I know, everything takes more time than we'd like, especially in Harrisburg, but tenacity is a common characteristic of advocates and so here we still are. We are still working, still sending in comments, still fighting for and trying to assist individuals who live with disabilities.

There are many great advocates speaking today to talk about issues that are important. I am going to focus on three concerns regarding the Adult Protective Services Law: mandated reporting, training for Law Enforcement and the need for an adult abuse registry of convicted abusers.

First, I am very concerned that medical professionals and others may not report abuse or rape if the person is unable to report or file a complaint. This is a real concern. Currently in Pennsylvania, hospitals are "encouraged" to report abuse but are not **required** to report abuse. In meetings regarding the APS regulations, an example was shared of a case of a person in hospital where the doctors didn't perform a rape kit cause of the person's disability. They felt

they couldn't report the rape without consent and the person was unable to give consent. Think about this please: if an individual cannot give consent to an exam, how could they have possibly given consent for sex? While many individuals who live with a disability are able to consent to exams, many are not. It is important to err on the side of protection of the most vulnerable. I know people are sometimes uncomfortable making reports if a person cannot verbally share that abuse has occurred. We know from history and following child abuse cases that abusers can and have reported that bruises and cuts were self inflicted, low weight is due to the individual being unwilling to eat or having limited diet and that the individual was a willing participant in sexual acts. There are times that these stories may very well be honest reports but there are also times that these stories are actually covering abuse from authorities. We need mandated reporters to know the guidelines, understand the process and be held accountable for making reports. We need educational materials created and placed in the offices and service environment of mandatory reporters. We need colleges that are educating future staff and workers to teach about the need for and requirements of Mandated reporters when it comes to APS. We need organizations such as, PADDCC to fund conferences for advocacy, professional and service organization to include panels on preventing, identifying and reporting abuse. We need public service brochures on abuse, risk reduction, and reporting. We need them visible and readily available to everyone.

Second, Comprehensive Police training on how to respond to, evaluate, and pursue abuse complaints specific to individuals who require protective services is vital to properly enforcing this law. In order to ensure that every officer receives the necessary information, a specific training program must be included into the Act 180 continuing education program that Municipal Police Education Training Commission (MPOETC) creates and provides. As you may know, MPOETC is the only entity in Pennsylvania with the authority to create mandatory training for law enforcement officers. It is vital to the implementation of this law that every officer receive the same training. While many disability organizations may want to provide this training to departments in their community, I believe that the most cost effective and efficient method of delivering the high quality program that is required, would be to have a few advocates meet with MPOETC in order to provide resources and suggestions for the training program. This program must include how to take complaints using multiple communication methods, how to write incident reports, and investigate when the victim may not be able to provide verbal testimony. Officers will also need to learn where to locate local resources and supports for the victim and how to activate the Adult Protect Services System. We also need to have that same training put into the Act 120 training schedule as well. MPOETC has a long history of producing excellent training programs and I am confident that if MPOETC worked collaboratively with a few

disability organizations, the training that is developed for Pennsylvania's Law Enforcement training and delivered comprehensively to every officer it will be effective and possibly, a model for other states to follow, just as we have been for other Law Enforcement and disability programs.

Lastly, the goal of the Adult Protective Services (APS) program is to protect vulnerable adults whose health and welfare may be adversely affected by abuse, neglect or exploitation; raise public awareness of adult abuse issues; and educate mandatory reporters about their reporting responsibilities. I don't know how we can reach this goal without a registry of people who have been convicted of abusing an adult with a disability. **I am told that this is a "non-starter" for the legislators.** I have to ask; WHO thinks that protecting our most vulnerable residents from being abused, beaten, neglected, raped and murdered is controversial? I thought that was the point of the APS and a registry keeps those convicted of these crimes from having access to the same population that they previously abused.

I am told that the unions won't permit it. I have a hard time believing that the unions whose mission is to work for a "Just Society" and making sure that all families and communities thrive, would be against a registry that would protect not only vulnerable people but also the good and caring workers who they represent. I have to believe that they too, would want to make sure that their members were providing competent and compassionate care.

I am told that a registry like this will keep people from getting jobs in the field. To that I say **EXACTLY!** While a registry is not currently in the regulations, I felt it was important to bring up this topic in hopes that Pennsylvania would join other states in creating an Adult Abuse Registry and sharing that information with other states to protect the most vulnerable in our nation.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my concerns.