

Good morning representatives. My name is Tom Carasiti, I'm from Pike County, and I'm here with my wife Teri and son Glenn. Thank you for this time to make our appeal for your support. Our son has an Intellectual Disability, an IQ of 54, and the many challenges that accompany severe autism. Those challenges include severe attention deficit (he could never be expected to cross a street by himself), severe phobias (dozens of routine everyday sounds cause panic or distress), obsessive compulsiveness, no function of the brain part that makes us social creatures, only rudimentary language with no ability for conversation, and all of the above can cause frustrations leading to 2 year old behaviors in a large 24 year old adult. But that's all OK from mine and Teri's perspective, it's our challenge and it's what we all sign up for when we choose parenthood. Besides we're fortunate to have him and see the world through his very unique perspective. Of course the hurt we feel for him will never go away; for we know what he's missed out when compared to the skills and talents you, Teri, and I possess to handle life's journey.

But thanks to laws conceived by advocates and passed by legislatures like you, for 18 years he received an excellent inclusive specialized education. So instead of being expensively institutionalized, left rocking and self-stimming, Glenn was educated and learned many basic skills and was able to participate in family activities. Despite his numerous deficits and challenges, our state's leaders enabled him to be a citizen and exercise his right to "pursuit of happiness"; up and only through school age that is.

As you're aware, our ID and ASD adults have the right to be institutionalized, at tremendous costs, but we waive that right for a chance (the waiting list), that only you have the power to make happen, at a much less costly, but infinitely better, life at home family and community services.

Fortunately for Glenn and our family, thanks to most of you who were here during the budget 2012-13 process with Governor Corbett, Glenn received the graduate initiative and came off the waiver waiting list. So thank you very much.

What has he been doing with taxpayer's dollars on the waiver program? (quickly flip through slides showing Glenn's work week). Like us, even with a 54 IQ, he gets the connection of work and the quality of life it brings. He enjoys the self-worth of earning, being productive, and spending his way through life. He likes earning his "bucks" (as he calls it), and likes the ability to purchase his own "stuff" and even plan his vacation time. He self-manages his behaviors much better, reducing his need for meds and their side effects, because in his words, "I want to be a responsible adult." Your voting for graduate funding and waiver money in 2012 was the enabler here. Without that funding, he would be home on our couch. Without it his skills and behaviors would regress, possibly be too much for us in our advanced years, and therefore be institutionalized at a much higher taxpayer cost. A higher cost with an outcome unlike the results we have now.

It's another budget season and we have another graduate class that needs your support and that of your constituents. There are more Glenns about to leave the educational development system. Only you have the power to enable them the same opportunity Glenn has, the same opportunity most

Pennsylvanians, like us in this room, enjoy just by virtue of birth. Here's why I think it's a wise choice to spend PA tax dollars in this line item:

1. First of all, there's the higher government and ethical standard set forth in our constitution and its preamble. All citizens have an inalienable right to pursue happiness. It is your role to adhere to our constitutional standards for the security of its citizens and that basic needs are attainable for all. Well these are our most vulnerable citizens, not by their choice, that need our protection and, without a graduate waiver initiative, we deny them the same right in pursuit of happiness that you and I enjoy. A right we give them for education but not for adulthood.
2. We pay taxes for many government functions and infrastructure; an infrastructure of security, roads, environmental protection, administrations etc. to make it all work. It benefits the Pennsylvania economy, therefore it benefits you and me with our innate skill sets. But without waiver funding, special needs graduates are unable to enjoy the basic fundamentals you provide for our other state citizens.
3. What Glenn has, comes at an average annual cost less than his former annual special education costs. On average a special education student costs almost \$17,000 annually. The more severe, like Glenn, the costs are higher. What you saw in those photos, cost PA taxpayers about \$9000 per year. That's a very good outcome, at a reasonable cost, that doesn't waste the education investment PA taxpayers already paid for. It's a good outcome that helps support up to 3 jobs; Glenn's, his job coach, and in some cases a parent doesn't have to quit work to stay home with their son or daughter.
4. It's a smart investment of Pennsylvania taxpayer dollars because it immediately leverages an almost 52% federal match. How many places can you get over 100% return to inject more money into the Pennsylvania economy. The money doesn't go to Glenn or us; it goes directly to Pennsylvania jobs.
5. There's a new emphasis, and rightly so, with an influx of funding for schools and OVR to place special needs individuals in jobs before they graduate high school. But the school supports of transportation, guidance, and coaching end at graduation. We will have setup both schools and OVR to fail, if we don't provide waiver funds so that individuals can keep the jobs implemented by schools and OVR. We must have the consistency in programs to prevent waste and continue the job placements post graduation.
6. Funding our graduates' waivers provides the positive benefits just noted and avoids other government costs for negative results such as welfare or increased medical costs. If a special needs graduates school without waiver funding, a parent may have to quit their job to stay home with their son or daughter. A single parent may have to choose welfare instead of their job to be home with their child. Additionally, a person going out to work versus at home on a couch is less prone for expensive medical or mental health treatment. This applies to the care-giver too. Since our son went out to work, he self-manages his behavior that was previously controlled with expensive psychotropic medicines with long term serious health side effects. Taking him off one of these meds reduced his weight by 30 pounds and blood sugar by 18 points. We should take the positive pro-active approach and transition our graduates with continued developmental services with Medicaid money and

avoid using Medicaid retroactively for welfare or increased medical/mental health costs, or worse, force a family to choose their entitlement of expensive institutional care.

7. Lastly, relative to the whole, it's rather inexpensive too. The proposed budget calls for an overall 7.1% increase. The proposed initiative only impacts the budget by 0.05%.

To summarize, please continue to fund the special needs graduates: it's necessary so they can pursue their right to happiness like you and me, it's needed so they can share and grow in the state infrastructure our taxes created for its citizens, we don't waste the special education the taxpayers already paid for, it's dollars that are over 100% matched by federal dollars going directly to Pennsylvania jobs, graduates who were at jobs because of school supports will lose their job if the waiver isn't there to pick-up the services, use Medicaid money pro-actively for a positive outcome instead of possibly on welfare, medical costs, or institutional care, and the budget impact is only 5/100 of a per cent.

I have one last request besides this year's initiative to fund the 2016 ID and ASD graduates for Medicaid waivers. We would like another line item to fund 1 month for the 2017 graduates. Even under the best circumstances, a budget passed on-time with a graduate initiative has a large gap before services can begin, 4 to 6 months as a best case. This gap causes hardships on the family wage earners, can lead to regression of skills for the ID or ASD individual, and those with jobs supported by school services will lose them during the service gap. Some budget years the services don't begin till spring the following year. If we can add a second initiative for 2017 graduates for 1 month, at a cost of only half-million dollars, this enroll them into the system and services can begin immediately at graduation in 2017. There will be no loss of continuity for the graduate. The school services prepared for by OVR and the school system continues. There's no regression of developed skills and the care-givers can plan their future in advance like what typical high school graduates enjoy. Typical grads aren't in limbo with their future on a waiting list subject to budget debates. Add \$.5 million for 2017 graduates and they can be the first of many Pennsylvania classes to begin adult services once school services end. And then next year we won't be here asking for \$10million or more, only the \$.5 million to startup the 2018 graduates and so on. You have the power to solve this problem, to improve, have an impact, on large numbers of families' lives, and keep the line of Pennsylvania special needs graduates moving into adult services without interruptions. That one \$.5 million change to the budget will make a major difference on how Pennsylvania solved the special needs graduation problem.

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