

Testimony for the House Education Subcommittee on Special Education

Ms. Denika Chilton, parent, York Pennsylvania

Thank you, Chairman Ortity, Chairwoman Hill-Evans, and members of the committee for hearing my testimony today. My name is Denika Chilton, and I live in York, Pennsylvania. I am a mother with a child with an intellectual disability and on the autism spectrum which interferes with his behavioral health. He attends York City School District and has been in and out of the district due to the lack of services designed for his needs.

I first discovered my child had special needs when he attended Pre-K. His teacher recognized some of the signs in his development such as difficulty following directions, speech delay, and trouble with direct eye contact. After a short meeting, I was given a few pamphlets to read and that was it. I was left feeling alone, without anyone to talk to, any idea where to go from here, or why this was happening to my child!?

It was extremely overwhelming with the amount of paperwork, technical terminology, and everything that went along with trying to make the right choices for my son's education. There were times that the school's administrators told me that there was nothing they can do for him, and I needed to find another school for him. I felt hurt, I felt that my son wasn't good enough and didn't fit in their box that they expected to get an education like every other kid in the school district.

Over the years, we have tried him in a regular school setting, charter schools, Lincoln Intermediate, and special education. He is now 9 years old and currently in a life skill class provided by the York City School District. We have faced a lot of challenges when it came to getting services for my son. There is a 6-month minimum wait time just to be seen by a school

psychiatrist for an evaluation, and no time given for a direct support professional (DSP) to be assigned to my child for services in and out of school (known as wraparound services) because of the staffing issues within the behavioral health agencies.

I was also billed over \$4000 for these expenses. It is disheartening not only to be making difficult choices for services my child needs, but also finding insurance will only cover a portion of the cost of any wraparound services that are vital for my child. During the time spent shopping around from school to school or behavioral health agencies for a child with disabilities, my child is not receiving any services that benefit him and our family. Instead, I have been left to make vastly consequential decisions about my child's future with insufficient time, information, or any idea of how my family is going to afford these services.

I feel there needs to be a more rapid, holistic approach to intellectual disability education services for children like my son that is standardized across schools in Pennsylvania. There is no reason why my son should be penalized because of the zip code in which he lives! Every day that he is waiting to be seen by providers and for individualized plans to be created and implemented due to lack of resources for him, is another day that his intellectual and personal development may be unrepairable.

Thank you again for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.