

9/8/25

The Honorable Robyn K. Kennedy, Senate Chair

The Honorable Jay D. Livingstone, House Chair

Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

Massachusetts State House

Boston, MA 02133

Re: Written Testimony on S. 155. and H. 261. – Supported Decision-Making

Dear Chairs Kennedy and Livingstone and Members of the Committee:

My name is Maggy Walto and I am a Care Manager for Nonotuck Resource Associates. I am very passionate about Supported Decision Making because I believe strongly that everyone should have a Voice, a Choice, and their Rights. Guardianship can take away many of these things. I believe we need to offer a change in Massachusetts. WE are Model State in many ways in how we treat people. Now is time to Pass The Supported Decision Making Bill. Please Help Us!

I was part of an offered SDM Pilot Program through Nonotuck and CPR. In this pilot program, I was a SDM Facilitator and a Supporter on some of the teams. I have watched many of the SDM member's lives change by introducing them to Supported Decision Making.

After the start of SDM Pilot Program, I observed many of the SDM Members were quick to begin the decision-making process in their lives. For instance, we had an SDM Member want his own apartment, he leaned on his SDM Team for some guidance on how to go about making this happen. The parents had a one-on-one talk with him and without judgment pointed out the financial costs of the decision, as well as, the pros of independent living. In the end, the SDM Member made his own choice and wanted to pursue his first apartment.

A few of the SDM Members and families have been approached by the state about guardianship. The families believe that guardianship is not needed and there should be an offered alternative. One of the SDM Supporters said: 'my sister has a processing disorder and she just needs time to answer. She also needs support in understanding decisions, and she tends to lean on family to help her. This doesn't mean she needs a guardian. She needs patience and time to process. Then she is quite capable of making her own decisions about her life.'

Naturally most of us use a form of Supported Decision Making in our lives. When we receive a medical diagnosis or need to make a big decision, we tend to lean on our closest support to help us. People with disabilities deserve the same opportunity.

In closing, I believe that people should have options, including supported decision-making. I've seen SDM and I've seen the transformative power of it. As a Care Manager, I have had the experience of

having a court appointed guardian from Boston call me and not know a single thing about the person from the Berkshires they are guardian for. They were asking me about the person likes and dislikes and if a certain day program would benefit this person. Supported Decision Making would resolve this issue and the SDM Member would choose their closest support network to be a part of his or her team. The SDM model gives a supporter the flexibility of using different learning styles to help the person understand decisions.

It is time to pass The Supported Decision-Making Bill in Massachusetts. It is time that people step out of guardianship and into Support Decision Making. One of the SDM participants, who had ended his guardianship agreement described his experience using SDM as feeling His FREEDOM for the first time in his life. Let's help others feel their freedom and protect others from losing their freedom and Pass Supported Decision-Making Bill Today!

Thank for your time!

Maggy Walto

Supported Decision Making Supporter

Dalton, MA