

## Written Testimony of Nancy Gardner

Submitted to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
Hearing Chaired by Senate Chair Robyn Kennedy and House Chair Jay Livingstone

My name is Nancy Gardner, and you just heard from my son Jonathan. I want to thank you for listening to his testimony, because his voice is at the heart of why these bills matter to me so much.

I am here today in strong support of the Supported Decision-Making bill. This bill is not only important to us—it has been life-changing.

When Jonathan was 16, our school district encouraged me to pursue full guardianship for him simply because he was on medication. But I know my son, and I knew guardianship was not the right path. A piece of paper would never force Jonathan to do something he didn't want to do. That is how we found out about Supported Decision-Making.

I am privileged to be one of Jonathan's chosen supporters. When he was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma at 18, we were already using Supported Decision-Making. I cannot overstate how vital it was during that time. Jonathan's doctors didn't know what Supported Decision-Making was when he got sick. I had to explain that I wasn't just his parent, but I was a support person he had chosen. When Jonathan wanted to stop treatment, my role wasn't to decide for him. It was to help gather information, break it down, and make sure he had what he needed to make his own choice. Because of that support, he continued treatment—and that decision saved his life.

As a parent, my greatest fear has always been what happens when my husband and I are no longer here. Supported Decision-Making gives me peace knowing Jonathan's voice will always be heard, and that he will be surrounded by trusted people he has chosen. Supported Decision-Making has empowered him to grow into the confident advocate he is today. He is the guide of his own life.

I also want to strongly support the healthcare standards bill. Jonathan's cancer diagnosis took over five months to get. During that time, we went from doctor to doctor, and instead of listening to Jonathan's voice and pain, most of the focus was on his autism. His symptoms were dismissed or explained away as "behavior," instead of being taken seriously as signs of illness. That delay could have cost him his life. And even after his cancer diagnosis, Jonathan has been turned away from needed procedures simply because of his disability. When providers are trained to look past the label and really listen, all patients can get the care they need and deserve—and sometimes, that care can mean the difference between life and death.

These two bills matter so much to me. Supported Decision-Making matters because it lets people with disabilities and older adults make their own choices, with the trusted people they choose to support them. It is not meant to replace guardianship; it simply adds another choice. More options mean more people can find what works best for them.

The healthcare standards bill matters because patients get the care they deserve, and providers gain confidence in treating people with disabilities. Both these bills need to be law because they can give every person the chance to live their best life.

Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.

Respectfully submitted, Nancy Gardner