



## *Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council*

*108 Myrtle Street, Suite 202  
Quincy, Massachusetts 02171*

*MAURA HEALEY  
GOVERNOR*

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

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Representative Jay Livingstone, Chair  
Senator Liz Miranda, Vice Chair  
Representative Judith Garcia, Vice Chair  
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
Massachusetts State House  
Boston, MA 02133

### **Re: H.261/S.155 An Act relative to authorizing supported decision-making agreements for certain adults with disabilities**

My name is Sandra Heller, and I live in Marion. I am a member of the Massachusetts Developmental Disability Council, where our mission is to provide opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities and families to enhance independence, productivity and inclusion. But more importantly, I am the proud parent of a 38-year-old man named Craig, who has Down Syndrome.

I am here today to emphasize the importance of Senate Bill 155 and House Bill 261, “An Act relative to Supported Decision-Making Agreements for Certain Adults.”

Twenty years ago, when my son Craig turned 18, our family chose not to pursue legal guardianship. We have always lived by a simple principle: **first, presume competence**. We believe that every person, regardless of disability, deserves the right to make their own choices with support from people they trust.

Today, I am thrilled to report that this approach works. Craig leads a full and independent life. With the help of four trusted supporters—family and caregivers he chose himself—he decides where he lives, where he works, and how he spends the money he earns. He is a registered voter. Most importantly, he is an active partner in his own healthcare, understanding and communicating his medical needs because he is given the information and respect to do so.

My son’s story shows what is possible. We all rely on others to help us make big decisions. Craig is no different.

Unfortunately, too many adults with disabilities are placed under restrictive guardianships, stripping them of their legal rights when they could thrive with individualized support.



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[www.mass.gov/mddc](http://www.mass.gov/mddc)*



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Senate Bill 155 and House Bill 261 provide a solution. It establishes the legal framework for Supported Decision-Making in Massachusetts as a less restrictive alternative to guardianship. It creates clear roles and protections against abuse. Crucially, this bill would require courts to consider Supported Decision-Making **before** appointing a guardian. This simple step will protect the rights and dignity of countless individuals and reduce the burden on our probate courts.

This common-sense approach is endorsed by organizations like the American Bar Association and the National Council on Disability.

Supported Decision-Making does not replace guardianship; it provides an additional, empowering option that gives all people in Massachusetts the right to make their own decisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Sandra Heller  
Craig Kinney



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