

As the parent, guardian and caregiver for a significantly cognitively disabled son who has worked for 10 years in a work center based prevocational program, as well as in limited community employment, I am writing to implore you maintain prevocational services. There are tens of thousands of us out here, who depend on these work center based prevocational programs, who are on pins and needles anxiously waiting to see what actions are taken as a result of the Home and Community Based Services settings rule.

It is very disheartening to me to observe the "war" within the disability community over the issue of work center based prevocational programs. It seems on one side are rights lawyers and higher functioning self-advocates, and on the other side are the parents, guardians and caregivers of the significantly cognitively disabled actually using these services. Why can't we all come together for the good of our loved ones?

Through the support and training from my son's prevocational program here in Wisconsin, my son has had several community jobs. These have generally been 2-3 hours a week, which well suites his ability level. Recently he was "down-sized and lost a job at a dental office that he had held for over 7 years. He was devastated over this, but fortunately he always has his work center based program to fall back on. It is a place to go every day and contribute to the best of his abilities. He has many friends there, both disabled and non-disabled staff who he loves. He truly enjoys going there and is so proud of his paycheck (and it is totally unimportant to him, or to me, that it is relatively small).

If work center based prevocational programs are defunded, there will be a large transition of individuals who are currently working and getting the pride of a small paycheck, to adult day care programs. The data from several states that have eliminated these programs bears this out. Adult day care programs are right for some, but they are not right for my son.

I know you have probably heard these arguments a thousand times before, so I apologize for making them once again. But when you wake up every day trying to do what is best for your disabled loved one, you have to speak up when government agencies are taking actions can hurt him.

Seema.Verma@cms.hhs.gov