



Building Resources for Individuals with Disabilities to Gain Equality

GWEN HARSHAW'S SPEECH

September 27, 2018

Greetings and thanks so much for your time and attention to this important matter.

My name is Gwendolyn Harshaw. I was appointed by Governor Kasich's office to sit on the board of the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council (OSILC). On the OSILC board, we help facilitate the operation of organizations called Centers of Independent Living (CILS) which are all across Ohio, assisting citizens within the disability community to live independently as they see fit. I know individuals who utilize DSPs to assist them in daily living activities. Provide personal care to enhance their quality of life. This level of personal care helps the disabled population take greater part in our society. Not get overlooked due to their disability but included due to their ability. Not disregarded for being disabled but regarded for what they bring to the table.

I also serve as a board member for the Autism Society of Central Ohio (ASCO). As an active participant in the autism community, I know the struggles that exist for this easily misunderstood population. We take for granted the ability to speak up for ourselves, or to engage with one another with eye contact or reading body language to ease the communication process. DSPs are impacting the lives of individuals in the autism community by addressing travel needs, understanding the challenges in social environments and bridging that societal divide. In essence, being a friend.

I have invested plenty of time, energy and effort into serving on these boards along with participating within a few other organizations but my most important role is that of Mom. Specifically Zayne's mom. My introduction into the special needs community came via my son's autism diagnosis when he was four years old. I, just like many other parents and caregivers, navigated through the network filled with bureaucratic red-tape, evaluations, governmental agencies, waiting lists, applications, and paperwork. You learn who your friends are. They become more valuable than gold. You begin to meet people and their organizations founded to help families like mine. DSPs are those such people. The service they provide is invaluable and desperately needed. And with all the support DSPs provide, we need to respond to the alarm of getting them the support they need. They need to be supported with a livable wage and the recognition they so earnestly deserve. I want to rest easy in knowing that the system which provides and supports DSPs for families like mine, will be there if or when my family needs it.

I don't want to have use for the fire department but I am perfectly okay with the fire department being financially supported in case I need them. I don't have to explain the importance of the fire department. It is that serious.

The DSP system needs our support. Not just in Ohio but all around the country. "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" is a well-known phrase in the United States Declaration of Independence. The phrase gives three examples of the "inalienable rights" which the Declaration says have been given to all human beings by their creator, and which governments are created to protect. That does not exclude the special needs community. DSPs greatly aid in attaining those precious rights.

Thanks again for your time, attendance and mostly for your support.

