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I am addressing this commission today not only as an advocate for the Arc of St. Clair County but as the sister of a woman who happens to have Downs Syndrome. While the mental health system has made great strides in my lifetime, it has become a system with great ideals and perhaps intentions, however most of this has been relegated to little more than rhetoric for some known and some unknown reasons.

In 2008, the Michigan Department of Community Mental Health released a concept paper with the self-proclaimed intentions to “reinvigorate the public mental health system’s commitment to its core principles and values”. While I commend this commission’s effort to revisit these issues, it has been 5 years since the release of this paper, and here we are still urging you to take action on the same concerns.

According to the aforementioned paper:

A series of regional dialogs was held in 2006 between MDCH and over 300 people with Developmental Disabilities and their families. (Sound familiar?) The aggregated findings were as follows:

- They **Do not** realize they have the right to choice of providers
- They **Have not** received accurate and complete information about services and supports
- They obtain case management/supports coordination from workers whose caseloads are so large that the **workers do not have the time to listen to them** and take actions on behalf of consumers that best address their needs and preferences
- They **need support to engage in preferred and meaningful activities** during the day and evening, whether they live in their own home or in a group home
- **They want to have real work**
- **Would like widespread availability of the self-determination approaches**

I am here today, now 7 years later, with the same concerns. There is an apparent disconnect between MDCH policies and PIHP practice. Through the MDCH’s own findings they are readily aware of the issues at hand, and have been for at a minimum of 7 years, yet every day is a battle, every right to service a struggle.

I would urge this commission to consider what MDCH released in this concept paper under the headline “GUIDING PRINCIPLES”

**All people in Michigan will have access to a public mental health and substance abuse services system that supports individuals with mental illness, emotional disturbance, developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders. Of highest priority to the system is its obligation to serve individuals who have the greatest and severest needs. The system will provide adults the supports and services necessary to be healthy and safe and successfully:**

- Contribute to their communities,
- Earn an income in a non-segregated, community setting,
- Live in their own homes,
- Have full community inclusion, meaningful participation and membership,
- Have friendships and relationships, and
- Have a self-defined fulfilling life.

I assure you, had these principles truly been embraced nearly a decade ago and programs put into place to achieve them, I would not have the need to be here before you today. For far too many years people with mental illness and developmental disabilities have been subjected to archaic stereo-types and denied rights assured to them under the same laws and legislation you and I look to for protection. People with disabilities and mental illness are not numbers in a database that can be treated effectively by calculating their life into 15 minute Medicaid billable sections. It is time the MDCH and the PIHP's start treating them as the humans they are.