

Presentation to the Joint Commission on Health Care
Katherine Montgomery
September 4, 2008

Good morning Chairman Houck , Vice-Chairman Hamilton and members of Joint Commission on Health Care. .

My name is Katherine Montgomery. Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today about the MR and DD Waiver wait lists

First- a little bit about me-I am on the DD Waiver wait list and am currently a student at Northern Virginia Community College. My goal is to get a degree in Psychology and my dream is to help others because of what I've experienced growing up. You see, when I was younger, I went to a school that was segregated, where people with disabilities went to class with only other people with disabilities. I guess the school didn't know any better-separate but equal is not equal. Later on though- I went to a school where there was inclusion. I didn't feel like I was put in a "box" anymore. What I learned is that this not only helped me-but more importantly, it helped my classmates, my school and my community.

It is an exciting time for Virginians with developmental disabilities. Much like the schools did some time ago-Virginia is confronting the fact that separate but equal is not equal. Thanks to your help, people with developmental disabilities are breaking free from segregation and isolation-and the boxes that come with them.

I want you to know that I, and everyone else I know with or without a disability, do not want to live in institutions or nursing homes. However, thousands of us continue to wait for services to prevent that from happening. Because of this we all continue to struggle to have equality of opportunity and a life of our own in the community.

To be honest with you getting on the DD Waiver wait list in the first place was not all that easy. No one told me about it when I was in school. Finding out who to call for help was a real challenge. And once I found out who to call-I waited almost a year before I found out I was even on the wait list

I also want to tell you about a friend of mine named, Jeff Watkins. Jeff had significant physical disabilities and total visual impairment. Jeff, too, was *waiting* to even get on the DD Waiver *wait list*. Last week, at the age of 35, Jeff passed away...he was still waiting to find out if he was even on the list.

In Jeff's memory, I want to thank you for taking steps to ensure Virginia has a true "DD" System-where **all** people with developmental disabilities can access the information and support they need. Again-we are moving forward knowing "separate but equal is not equal".

I also want to tell you it doesn't matter what the diagnosis is-Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Autism -or what Waiver we're waiting for... we all have the same need, equality of opportunity, which is what the Waivers provide. We all also have the same dream-a day where someone with a developmental disability does not have to wait in line for equality. Hopefully, with your help, that day will come very soon.

Thank You

.