

Dear Leadership Friends,

Every few weeks I get an email or a phone call from a frantic parent who wants to know the best way to access services from one of the Area Agencies, the Mental Health Centers or the Schools. Most of these issues, when you boil it right down, are financial issues. Schools don't have the staff to implement an IEP or to purchase necessary equipment. The wait for an appointment with the right mental health provider is months long or worse, not available at all. The Area Agency has just informed you that even though your child is turning 21 soon and needs support, you are not going to get the money for those supports for a while.

All of these situations are horrible, and they SHOULD NOT happen. Not to you, or to me. Not to our children...not to anyone. The fact of the matter though is that they do happen. Everyday.

There is a solution though, it seems really simple to me. I have been saying it for years and it doesn't change. Get to know the people you vote for and develop a better relationship to those in office. I am telling you, they are the decision makers. They are the ones who vote on the budget and they are the ones who ultimately decide if there is money in the coffers for you and for me.

What do I mean, develop a relationship? Invite them for coffee, have them to your house for a chat, get to know them. This does not mean that you must become their best friend. Think about it for a minute...When you need a favor, who do you ask? Do you ask a stranger? Of course not! You ask a trusted friend, a family member, a neighbor right? The same is true when a favor is asked of you. I am much more likely to do a favor for someone I know than for someone I don't and the truth is, the bigger the favor, the better friend they should be. Same is true in politics my friends! When it comes to the supports we need we need as many allies as we can get!

This is not partisan, it is not about right and wrong, good or bad; it is about putting yourself, your needs and those needs of the people you care about in front of those who divvy up the money. Please know that the election of our fellow Leadership grad Governor Hassan does not guarantee anything. Many people have wrongly stated to me of late that with Governor Hassan and a democratic majority in the House, we are in great shape. Remember our beloved Governor Lynch who did not give a single dollar to the waitlist in his budget for the last 6 years of his term?

As a mother, I am thrilled that someone in the corner office knows a little about what my life is like, but I also know that I have to develop a relationship with all of the decision makers, especially those who represent me if I want to make a change. So do you.

Top 5 reasons you should develop a relationship with your Reps.

1. There are 400 House members and 24 Senators (don't forget 5 Executive Councilors); one of them is bound to be your neighbor, and you should know your neighbors!
2. They all put their pants (or skirts) on the same way you do (and if you are a frantically busy parent like me, then backwards is how you do it most of the time).
3. They work for you, it is their job to represent you and your job to remind them how you would like to be represented.
4. They can't possibly know about all of the things related to disabilities, did you before you or your family member brought these issues to your attention? Teach them, they will appreciate it.

5. The average adult budget for DD services in NH is about \$44,000 per person per year. We are going to be asking for about \$40 million in NEW dollars this biennium. We need to make sure that ALL reps who vote on the budget understand what they are voting on. There are 424 Reps that need educating. There are over 900 Leadership grads. We can do this!

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