

Date:

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“IT IS NOT THE DISABILITY THAT MAKES LIFE DIFFICULT, IT IS THE BARRIERS POSED BY THE ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL CENTER”

Good afternoon honorable members present at this hearing, My name is Nancy Canchola mother of three children with special needs with a diagnosis of Autism among other disabilities. I currently have two children who are clients of the Regional Center, one is 11 and one is 9.

My son was qualified for services with the Orange County Regional Center from the age of two as part of the early intervention program due to his speech and language disability since that was non-verbal. At 3 years the Regional Center discharged him from the system with the argument that it belonged to the corresponding School District to continue with language and speech services. From that moment we faced the first barrier within the Regional Center since they did not carry out any appropriate evaluation to verify if my son continued to meet the eligibility criteria to continue with services. In 2016, my 6 year old son was requalified to continue receiving services through Orange County Regional Center, and my 9 year old daughter was rated at age 6 in 2019.

My experiences within the Regional Center system have been one of constant struggle and advocacy as we are faced with barriers on a daily basis. In multiple IPP meetings, the service coordinator has told me that respite is the only service available for children under 18 years old. Arguing that the services are offered after the age of 18 during adulthood.

In my first request when I requested respite for my daughter, I encountered the second barrier, since they offered me the respite service as a shared service, offering that my son shared half the hours of respite with his sister. Disagreeing with this unfair plan as a family, we had to go through the hearing process, which was physically, mentally and emotionally draining. We applied to OCRA for help and were denied direct representation on the grounds that they did not have sufficient funds to represent all the cases. For this reason, as a family we had to prepare ourselves to collect evidence, advocate and follow the entire process that requests the hearing process despite being only parents, we saw the need to perform the function as a lawyer. As part of the preliminary process of the hearing, we encountered the third barrier, since the Regional Center refused to receive the evidence documents, and hours before the hearing, the Regional Center informed the Judge that the hours of respite individual for my daughter were already approved. As a result of the Regional Center's unfair process and strategy, parents refrain from requesting services.

During the time our family continued to face barriers, we requested some orthopedic insoles for my daughter recommended by a specialist podiatrist. The service coordinator requested that we submit the denial letter from the health insurance. Upon submitting the denial letter, the coordinator denied the request and requested that we submit the appeal letter from the health insurance. Even presenting all this evidence and following the process requested by the coordinator, the request was rejected for the second time. In the end, the Regional Center told me that since my daughter receives the SSI benefit, the cost of the orthopedic insoles should be covered through that benefit. This is another technique that the Regional Center uses to deny generic services, which I believe is an unfair and discriminatory process.

Currently we request the recreational service: music and swimming, and even expressing and evidencing the needs of the consumer so that they have access to inclusion and socialization in the community. Another barrier was presented again, the coordinator and supervisor offered the exchange of services for hours of respite. Being an unacceptable and inappropriate offer that privatizes consumers from having access to services in an accessible way. It remains clear and evident that Orange County Regional Center is not in compliance with DDS and Lenterman Act directives.

Our desire as a family is to have accessibility to services in an effective way within the Orange County Regional Center according to the needs of my children as consumers, for example: personal assistant, recreational and social services: such as swimming, music, camping, art. , purchases of educational services and housing.

To conclude this testimony, I request support so that the economic resources received by the Orange County Regional Center reach and are distributed equitably to the entire community and there is no more discrimination, disparity, injustice and barriers to access services for consumers.

I thank the audience and the public present for listening to my testimony, which like many is an example of the barriers that we experience every day as a community within the Orange County Regional Center system.