

Testimony of President Marc Krasnick at the Dane county
Budget Hearing, September 19, 2006

Two years ago, I made my first appearance before the County Board as a new member of The Arc – Dane County, and a parent of my now 19 year old daughter, Meredith, who has a number of developmental disabilities. I am sure many of us remember it was nothing short of a mob scene as many concerned citizens appeared in response to a proposal that funding be cut for both individuals with traumatic brain injuries as well as continuation of vocational support for high school graduates. Over five hours of passionate testimony was presented, and you listened carefully to everyone. Thank you for that. Many of us are grateful that you were able to be highly responsive to our concerns and you were able to restore the ability to continue to fund these badly needed and much appreciated services.

Last year I appeared for a second time, then as vice president of the Arc – Dane County Board and I think we were all pleased that the proposals in your budget were far less controversial. The primary point in my testimony last year was a question and concern about what the impact would be from the required identification and implementation of “system efficiencies” of almost \$1.5 million dollars. Once again, while not everyone will ever be totally happy with almost any difficult decision the County Board needs to make, it appears the Human Services staff were able to find a number of ways to continue to serve those currently receiving services with viable alternatives to produce the needed savings.

This year, I am here for a third time, now as the President of The Arc – Dane County Board. Kathleen, I too am finding out that it can be “very lonely at the top” although fortunately for me, my issues are not of the same magnitude as yours. Let me share our formal position on the Human Services budget request for 2007 which is as follows:

In her letter of August 11, 2006, Director Lynn Green states that she is requesting an increase of \$4.3 million over the 2006 levels. The budget request continues the funding of vocational support for High School Graduates and for new consumers who have Traumatic Brain Injury. Green says “These service enhancements are largely funded through new and innovative efficiencies.” An increase in wages for newly hired workers is also included in the budget request.

For adult services, a part of the budget shows a drop of \$1,474,805 in General Purpose Revenue. Costs of many items, including transportation and health benefits, are on the rise. Several years of cuts have been absorbed into these services. As of August 2006, 345 people are waiting for vocational and/or residential support services in Dane County. This number continues to increase every year and represents an 85.5% increase since December 2001.

The Arc applauds the efforts to continue service for those with Traumatic Brain Injuries and the High School Graduates. It makes sense to continue these long standing practices. Yet we are concerned that existing services are being eroded and there are an increasing number of people waiting for service.

The Arc-Dane County request:

We believe now is the time to fund those waiting and restore the nearly 1 and a half million dollars in General Purpose Revenue.

And now let me share my personal perspective. Your published budget summary shows the drop of \$1,474,805 in General Purpose Revenue. This is especially significant since the full impact of taking into account the state and federal matching dollars results in a loss of funding of over \$3.4 million dollars.

As a parent, I find it difficult to understand the intricacies of our county's budget, but what I do understand is the frustration and, yes, even despair, at seeing the continued increase in the waiting lists for residential and vocational support for individuals with developmental disabilities. My daughter Meredith is one of the people that all too often is forgotten when we talk of numbers. Meredith is just one of the 345 people on the waiting list. When I asked when we might expect residential support for our daughter who is eligible today, we were told due to budget limitations it may be ten years or more – we can't be sure.

What my family and many others need to know is whether or not there is a plan to reduce and ultimately eliminate this waiting list. We need to know if there is light at the end of this long dark tunnel we are lost in and when we can expect to see a turn-around by reducing the waiting list rather than seeing it increase each year.

If someone knows that they are going to run a marathon, they learn that it is 26 miles in length they and can both physically as well as mentally prepare for it. They know how far away the finish line is, and they can make appropriate plans to prepare and find the endurance to finish the race. It may surprise you to learn that I am not a marathon runner, but I do know that if someone is asked to begin a marathon without knowing it is 26 miles long, and they get tired after running several miles, it is human nature to give up because if they simply don't know or believe that the end is in sight.

Please don't just give us a budget and tell us here is the impact for the coming year. Share with us your goals, identify the milestones and present your vision for enabling everyone with developmental disabilities who needs these services to understand that you are committed to not only reduce, but to ultimately eliminate the waiting lists. This will enable us to prepare and have the stamina and motivation to stay in the race of our lifelong care giving responsibility to those we love.

Marc Krasnick

President

The Arc-Dane County Board of Directors