

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am Jennifer Graham, from the Philadelphia area, the mother of four children and the coordinator of TransitionMap.org, an online resource guiding families through the transition from special education to adult life in the community. In my home community, I am better-known as “Mark’s Mom.”

Mark, our second child, was born with Down syndrome 21 years ago. I am here today to thank you for the services that Medicaid has provided over these 21 years. The journey from the moment we were told Mark had mental retardation to the brink of his adulthood has been overwhelmingly challenging and deeply rewarding.

We were determined that Mark would always live with us, in our family home, in our home community, despite our pediatrician saying, “ I can’t guarantee you anything about his development except that he will probably recognize you as his mom and dad.” He then suggested that Mark could be “sent away” or be put up for adoption. Institutionalization of any kind was never an option, nor was adoption. And, now, having raised Mark to adulthood, we know absolutely that raising Mark just like our other three kids, with high expectations to do his best and to contribute to his community was the right choice for him, for us, and for the community – we have all learned so much from Mark.

BUT we could not have done this without the support of programs funded by Medicaid. Mark was only three weeks old, and home from the ICU only two days, when he began to receive early intervention services, funded through Medicaid dollars. Those early childhood educators and therapists not only provided Mark outstanding infant stimulation programs, they gave my husband and me desperately needed reassurance and hope for our son’s future. We are convinced that his success today as an honor roll student in high school and a part-time employee in a local grocery store is greatly due to those excellent early intervention programs.

When Mark entered public school he used sign language but could not yet speak. His gait was very unsteady and he had trouble learning how to hold a pencil and process sequences of letters that formed words. Again, Medicaid-funded speech, hearing, occupational and physical therapies were provided to him through our school district; Mark’s independence today is testimony to the positive outcome of those services. His Medical Assistance has paid for comprehensive hearing evaluations and for his hearing aids and FM devices which our private insurance would not cover. Without those aids, Mark could not be as independent as he now is.

As Mark – and we – navigate the complex transition from the entitlement to a free public education to the eligibility requirements of adult services for individuals with intellectual disabilities, Medicaid-funded programs will enhance and support his ability to work and to live as independently as possible in our community. Mark already has taxes deducted from his paychecks and actively contributes to his community, but he continues to need job coaching services to master new tasks assigned to him in the store's deli. He wants to live in his own apartment in our small town, but he will need supports, currently funded by Medicaid dollars, to do so. While we have paid out-of-pocket for many additional services, we could not have paid privately for all the programs Mark has accessed in the past 21 years that were funded by Medicaid dollars. We, like most Americans our age, are also struggling to pay our mortgage, college tuitions for our other children -- and trying to save something for our own retirement and needs as aging adults.

Americans have invested so much in this generation of children with disabilities. Our tax dollars invested in Medicaid-funded community-based programs have resulted in documented improvement in many of our kids' physical, intellectual, social, academic and independent living skills. We cannot afford to lose those programs and risk a return to a much more costly, segregated institutional model.

We baby-boomers have high expectations for our teenagers and have raised them, with Medicaid's support, to be part of the community. When Mark graduates from high school this June, we will have many prayers of thanksgiving for all the skilled therapists, doctors, and developmental specialists who have guided us on this journey. I will also give thanks to the American system that allocated Medicaid dollars to pay those skilled professionals. I sincerely hope that the next generation of families who have children with disabilities will have funded programs that give them a chance to build fulfilling lives rich in opportunity and ability.

Thank you.

Jennifer Graham
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