

Andy Pittman Candidate for House of Delegates District 94

Statement:

You will find no stronger advocate for the intellectual and developmental disabled community in the General Assembly than me. Having grown up in a single family household with an I / DD sibling, I have developed a deep appreciation and understanding of the need to be tolerant of others with differences, and to make sure they are included in the community. After my parents separated when I was thirteen years old, I helped my mother care for my mentally and physically challenged sister. Caring for them I experienced, both firsthand and through their eyes, the pain of ostracization and exclusion just for being different from the accepted norm. These experiences have instilled in me a lifelong lesson of the importance of treating everyone with decency and respect, regardless whether they are different physically or hold differing views or opinions.

Like many lifelong caregivers, my mother's identity was tied to caring for my sister, and she was reluctant to accept any outside assistance. My sister was on the waiting list for a Medicaid waiver slot for about 13 years. Eventually, my mother was no longer able to care for my sister due to declining health and repeated hospitalizations, and I became my sister's guardian. Fortunately, shortly after we entered crisis mode, my sister received a waiver.

After my mother passed away, my sister moved into an apartment managed by the Hope House Foundation. In many ways, Hope House has become a second family for my sister. Given the myriad health challenges my family has faced over the past few years, there is no way we could have provided anything close to the level of care my sister receives from her Hope House team. It is a tremendous relief knowing that my sister is in good hands. Hope House has done so much to broaden her life and horizons, and has helped her become an active part of the community while maintaining her own independent life. We look forward to great things in the years to come!

Given these experiences, I'm intimately familiar with the complex issues facing I / DD individuals and their families. On a statewide scale, the significant issue is funding, as waivers are issued according to the number of waiver slots funded. Expansion of the availability of waiver slots and full funding of those slots will be a top priority, as well as an increase in reimbursement rates to insure sufficient staffing levels and incentivize a greater provision of services within the industry to I / DD individuals. I will also work to make the system more proactive, as early intervention, before there is a crisis, will improve the quality of life for I / DD individuals and their families, as well as reduce costs over the long term. Additionally, I would like to see the Hope House model, where I / DD individuals reside in their own apartments and are encouraged to be part of the community, replicated throughout the state. Such programs enhance the quality of life of I / DD individuals and allow them to live their lives with purpose and dignity. I will always fight for and advocate for the I / DD community!

Thank you,

Andy Pittman, October 2023