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My name is Linda Brauer. I have been the Chapter Coordinator of CHADD of Grand Rapids, (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), for 18 years. Though I had enjoyed being a classroom teacher before adopting our son, becoming a parent redefined everything I ever thought I knew about children and myself,--AND unconditional love.

The compassion that decision makers have shown toward children with autism gives me much hope--particularly in these most uncertain times. When parents are faced with having to chart their own course, blindfolded, and find their way through a vast wilderness of fears of the unknown, at least these families will know their community was invested in their children's success. No one should have to travel the path alone.

Like parents of children with autism, I have been privileged to meet some unsung heroes, along the way. One mother called CHADD, worried because she and her husband could no longer afford their son's psychiatric medications. He was already in a school for the emotionally impaired. Even though they had mental health benefits, her son had reached his maximum allowable mental health benefits, for life, at age 12. Unfortunately, her husband had a job, so they were not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid or Patient Assistance programs, nor did they make enough money to pay for his neuropsychiatric treatment. She said they had lost their home, trying to pay for his medications, but that their four children didn't understand why their home was "just sitting there empty," and they could no longer live there, though they needed a home.

Raising children with a brain disorder can cost parents their careers, homes, life savings, relationships, and marriages. These parents are working harder than most, but have little to show for their efforts. It is easy to blame parents or the child, whose only symptoms can easily be mistaken for willfulness and being bad. Even when trying to explain, it may seem as if the parent is enabling their child and making excuses. The anguish and isolation they experience can be oppressive. They lose confidence and hope. The damage caused by not being able to afford treatment goes beyond families being forced into financial ruin, at a time when they are most vulnerable. It's the message it sends, that in Michigan it's okay to turn our backs on our fellow citizens, and blame them for what we have failed to provide. To discriminate against people with mental illness tells families and individuals that some people "deserve" to be "written off," and that no amount of faith or love for their children makes any difference. To continue to ignore their personal sacrifice and relentless, impassioned letters and testimonies is cruel and dehumanizing.

It can understandably be hard to believe that behavior isn't necessarily rooted in one's moral character or upbringing, or believe that medical treatment can somehow magically transform a child into being a more caring, thoughtful, considerate, reasonable, responsible human being -- in less than an hour! I would find it hard to believe, too, if I hadn't witnessed this miracle, myself, everyday. Medical treatment can be what finally makes other treatments effective. With new research and safe and effective treatment options now available, as well as a federal law that passed in 2008, that Michigan still has not implemented, what are we waiting for? We know what works! Why would we help some, and leave others behind, just because they had one diagnosis instead of another? Why would we treat half a child? Why would we treat a child's autism, but not their AD/HD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Anxiety, and their Obsessive Compulsive Disorder? Without diminishing treatment for autism, please require that coverage be expanded to include equitable coverage for all neuropsychiatric disorders. Please do not leave our families behind. Thank you.