

**The Arc of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change**

**FLEXIBLE FAMILY SUPPORTS
Department of Mental Retardation**

Originally Line Item 5920-3000,

New line Item in House 1, 5920-2007 combined with Day/Employment and Transportation

BACKGROUND:

The Department of Mental Retardation serves approximately 33,000 people, 14,000 of whom receive some type of Flexible Family Supports. This account is reserved for those individuals who live at home with their families. People with cognitive disabilities have a range of issues. Families generally ask for only those supports that will keep the family together: weekend respite; adaptive clothing (diapers, shoes); adaptive equipment (shower stalls, ramps, furniture) - whatever it takes to keep the family member comfortable in the family home. Providing flexible Family Supports is considered one of the most cost effective programs in the Commonwealth. Families report that the Family Support allocation has been the pivotal reason the family member is able to stay at home.

BUDGET ISSUE TO ADDRESS:

It is common for people with multiple disabilities living with their families to go into crisis. Marriages dissolve, caretakers get sick, able bodied children feel ignored. The funding for this program helps families endure crises and remain intact. When supports are not available, families seek alternative care for their loved one. For children, they may go into a residential school, for adults, the family will request a community residential placement. The cost differential between keeping a person with a serious disability at home with their family vs. moving into a residential placement can be astronomical. Private residential placements can easily reach \$150,000 per year. Adult residential programs are in the vicinity of \$65,000 per year. In contrast, most families receiving Flexible Family Supports costs the state about \$500-\$700 per year.

FY '08 BUDGET -House 1:

In House I of the 2008 budget, the document combines three accounts, Day/Employment/ Family Supports and Transportation into one mega account. This spells disaster for Family Supports. The Department has the discretion to fund only one program of the three and could easily fund Day Services or Transportation with no allocations for Family Support. The combined accounts are \$7,000,000 short and require cutting 1 day of day/work services to 1459 individuals and reducing family support to as many as 750 people.

FY '08 BUDGET REQUEST

Though the Family Support program serves the largest number of individuals, the funding allocated is less than five percent of the Department of Mental Retardation budget. Other than \$500,000 added in the FY '06 budget, this account had been level funded for the past eight years. However, there is a serious waiting list and many young families have no idea that such a program exists. Please restore the \$7 Million in cuts in Employment, Transportation and Family Support! The Arc of Massachusetts requests an additional \$5,000,000 in Line Item 5920-3000. This will allow 1,700 additional people with disabilities and their families to be served.