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FROM OUR READERS

Support needed for developmentally disabled

Great article ["Hundreds rally in support of services for Maryland's developmentally disabled," Oct. 7] covering the town hall meeting on the crisis in services for people with developmental disabilities. According to sign-in sheets, 600 people showed up to voice their fears and frustrations about budget cuts and waiting lists for this vulnerable population. Yes, we are in a recession and everyone is suffering, but some cuts are just too much.

Older parents like [Diane and Donald Creed] are among the 19,000 people waiting for vital services. Not only are people with disabilities not getting the opportunity to move into their own homes, relieving their aging parents of caregiving, the families are not even getting a break. Respite care funding has been cut severely.

Underfunded nonprofit agencies providing these services — even well-managed ones — are struggling to survive. As it is, over the past 10 years they have lost \$104 million state and federal dollars due to lack of cost of living increases, as documented by the independent Community Services Reimbursement Rate Commission and Consumer Price Index data.

Now, a 2 percent across-the-board cut. Support agencies are cutting staff hours, even jobs, thus penalizing dedicated workers and risking the quality of services. The article quotes service provider Ian Paregol as saying that residential agencies are combining houses to save money. He called this "institutionalization within a community." But what does this mean? It means that people are being wrenched out of their homes and dropped into someone else's house. These are human beings.

Moreover, these are confused, frightened human beings who cannot under-

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stand why this is happening. They then, understandably, act out their fears to the point where they need costly behavior management services. Who wins? With institutions, the system saw only beds to be filled. In recent years it had evolved to one of support for an individual's unique needs — support that does not have to be more expensive. Has our society regressed to the point where it will once again strip people with disabilities of their dignity and humanity and call it caregiving?

At this town meeting and at more planned across the state, we can only hope public officials will hear the voice of people with disabilities and their families and of those who wish to provide them with humane services and supports.

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The writer is the mother of someone with a disability and a board member of Jubilee Association and The Arc of the United States.