

## Written Testimony of Paola Jordan

Public Hearing hosted by New York State Legislators Senator Bill Perkins, Assembly member Robert J. Rodriguez

Thursday January 14, 2016

My name is Paola Jordan, I am a resident of East Harlem and I am the mother of twins Maya and Thomas Jordan, they will be eight years old this march -both have developmental disabilities-.

My boy started receiving Early Intervention Services when he was almost 2 months old and my daughter when she was 13 months old. As a family, we have to overcome many obstacles in order to access the services that they needed. Today, I am proud to tell you that both of my kids attend a public school in East Harlem and they are making continuous progress.

Reaching this point wasn't easy. On the contrary, it was extremely hard and required that my husband and I, and many other families, had to rearrange our priorities; we had to make sacrifices and invested thousands of hours of ferocious advocacy efforts in order to access what was needed for our kids.

This has been a constant battle, navigating different systems. We were able to reach out to various not-for-profit agencies who helped us and supported us on this journey. We were able to connect with other parents who were generous to share their journeys with us and we had the support of many professionals who worked closely with my kids and my family.

The only missing component in our journey is the support from our local politicians and legislators who should work together with individuals with disabilities and their families to make this a priority on their agenda, the voice of our community and loved ones. Our politicians should advocate to secure more funding for different programs that serve individuals with developmental disabilities, such as Early Intervention, to support the special education preschools who offer high quality therapeutic services that are not readily available in most public preschool settings such as Universal Pre-K programs and more.

Politicians shouldn't be afraid to say "disabled" and recognize that individuals with disabilities are also part of their community, recognize them as their constituency.

I want to invite you to make a difference now, put disability front and center in your agenda! Our loved ones and families can no longer be ignored.

Disability is not a source of shame. Not for my kids, not for my family, nor for many of my friends. And not for millions of others. There is no longer a need to distance ourselves from it, this isn't the 60's anymore.

I hope you accept this invitation, today you have a room full of parents and self-advocates that will be right behind you, supporting your efforts. Don't waste this opportunity to make a change and to shape your legacy to future generations.

Thank you,

Paola Jordan

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