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Good Evening,

My name is Bryan Dooley and I am a member of the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, appointed by Governor Pat McCrory. I am also a board member of Disability Rights North Carolina, a board member for the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in my area called The Adaptables, a founding member of the NC Empowerment Network, and a member of the Post- Secondary Education Alliance which meets here at the Carolina Institute on Development Disabilities. I want to thank McCafferty for convening this event. I look forward sharing my ideas on this panel.

The Title of this discussion is Variation of a Full Life so I thought I would talk about how my life is different yet still a full and productive life. One of the obvious differences is I do not have a traditional 9-to-5 job right now. Instead, I started writing a blog for the Huffington Post called Observations from Below. I also have a web site with the same title. The Huffington Post offers me exposure and it is really cool to say I write for the Huffington Post because it is widely known national publication. Unfortunately, they do not pay every blogger so I needed a source of income.

I work as an independent contractor for a local lawyer and friend of mine named Bailey Liipfert. He was starting a new law practice and he brought me in to help provide social media and blog content for his business. This corresponds with Special Needs Trust, Elder Law, and other fields of his practice. I help him in his practice stay connected to the disability community. While I am forever grateful for the job, it is small and does not pay the rent. On the other hand, Liipfert has given me the freedom to sit on all these boards and have an expansive impact on the Tar Heel state.

My family structure is a little bit non-traditional also. I am an only child. My single mother raised me with the help of my grandparents and several aunts. I have a large village. I have many cousins who are much more like siblings. I am closest to my cousin Jay and his wife and kids, one who calls me "Automan". Also, my cousin Cara who is two weeks younger than me and lives near me. To illustrate our relationship, I'll tell a very brief story. One day I took her along with me to see Jean-Michel Cousteau because she is interested in Marine Biology. At some point during his presentation, he invited everyone to move closer. She told me not to get up. Another girl gave her such a dirty look not knowing we are related. Cara would never make fun of me in a malicious way.

My relationship to my direct support professional (DSP) is non-traditional also. In general, I have heard a lot of them do not stay around long for good reasons. The pay is not good and typically there are no benefits. Some DSP work multiple jobs to make enough money to live on. My story in contrast has continuity. My mother chose my DSP when I first got on the CAP program, which is now Innovations. For those who don't know, Innovations is a state service which keeps people at risk for institutionalization out of institutions and in their communities. As a side note, we need a whole lot more Innovations slots. There are actually more people on the waiting list than are receiving services. The list is about 10 years long. My good luck with DSP's has continued through college, and even through today. In college, all my DSP's had some kind of connection with Guilford College softball team. My first DSP was a star on the team, and she approached the second one about taking the job, and so on. I remain close to my DSP's even when they are not working with me. So far, I've attended three of their weddings.

My school career has also been nontraditional. I started at a unique school in Winston Salem called the Children's Center for the physically handicapped in about 1992. Let me make clear that I believe integration as much as possible. But I did benefit from the Children's Center because it let me grow up with my peers who had disabilities and some other students who did not. I still keep in touch with some of my friends from way back in pre-school. We've all graduated college and many of us are doing great things in our chosen fields, although with varying financial success. I've been told by one of my former teachers that because of the laws we have today, I would not have been in that school to begin with. I would have been mainstreamed from the beginning. From my perspective, that would have been a bad thing. I would not have had the strong relationships with people with disabilities like me. I found many of the same group in Bolton Elementary school, and took classes with my same friends all the way through fifth grade. Overall, my experience at Bolton was productive with teachers. I did have one bad experience with my first-grade teacher. She was on the edge of retirement, so she did not have the patience to deal with a student with disabilities. This teacher went to see one of my support staff to handle teaching me, which was not her job.

Like many children, middle school changed my life. At middle school, I shared a room with another person with disabilities who had a more severe disability than I did. I am still angry with myself for the way I treated him. I made fun of him originally, because I can remember two reasons why. For one thing, he had a purple wheel chair, which at the time, I thought was sissy. The other reason was that he was one of the few people I was physically bigger than. One day, John gave me a dirty look, and Catholic guilt kicked in. So that day, I turned over a new leaf, and became a friend and advocate for him. We shared an occupational therapist, so I talked to her about his case, and looked out for him that way. I know that's not supposed to happen, but that's what happened. I had two other experiences in this school I should talk about. One was another bad teacher. This time, she refused to teach me because I had CP, and she had a previous student with CP who was a problem child. So, she made the assumption that all of us with CP were problems. She didn't know it, but she almost caused a march on Meadowlark. At that time, I had many friends in the school system, who were all angry with this teacher. I was reassigned to a different teacher, and did better in her class. Meadowlark is where I met another mentor who had CP. He was in law school at the time, and inspired me to focus on academics to improve my chances in life. This was a good thing and a bad thing, because I developed a tendency toward perfectionism, which is not the healthiest mindset. I didn't make another B until college, and even then, it was only one B, in a class I didn't need, Informal Logic. But that comes later.

By high school, I was becoming recognized for all my advocacy. I won two major awards. The first was the Yes I Can Award in Assistive Technology, because I taught teachers how to use different programs. My school did a special fundraiser when I was a freshman and gave me the money to fly to Salt Lake and collect my Award. On the day I left, all the students and staff lined the hall and clapped as I was leaving. I also received the Matthew C. Graziadei Award for being the top advocate in the state for keeping disability issues in people's faces through an advice column. It was not all perfect at Reagan High School.

Once again, I had one bad teacher. I was very interested in journalism. I took the introductory class and got an A. But when it was time to sign up for the actual newspaper, the teacher took me aside and told me that I could not be a staff writer on the paper. She said that because it was more than writing, there are pictures, making corrections, and setting up the print for the paper. Looking back, my family and I should have fought them on the grounds of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Instead, I wrote an article over Christmas vacation to prove the point that I could produce good work. The teacher loved the

article, and my column, "Observations from Below" became one of the most popular parts in the newspaper. Because of my column, a lot of people started to talk to me, and I developed friendships. If I had not been stubborn, I probably would not have written my first column, and I would not be writing today.

While I am on the subject of high school, I should mention I was discouraged from taking A.P. classes, despite the fact that I only made A's in high school. I graduated high school as a member of the Honor Society, and went on to Guilford College. In college, I had a very supportive first year English teacher. I happened to show her a collection of my high school writings. She encouraged me to join the newspaper. Because of the things that my high school journalism teacher said, it took me two years to build up enough confidence to join the paper. For the teachers in the room, please be careful what you tell students. It can stick with them longer than you realize, both the positive and the negative. I joined the newspaper and loved the experience.

Newspapers have different levels. There are staff writers, who are on the lowest level, and then in the case of my college paper, there are Senior writers and editors, and the Editor in Chief, who is the student in charge. Just like everyone else in the class, I began as a staff writer. I impressed my professor and editors. Soon I was appointed a Senior writer. I still think this is one of my biggest successes, because the professor is not the one that makes the choice of senior writers. It was other students, who had the power to pick me.

Imagine if I had listened to that high school teacher, who I should point out, meant well. I wouldn't be writing for the Huffington Post today, and I wouldn't have had the major impact on Guilford that I was able to have through mainly the newspaper. In addition to the paper, I was in student Government and served on many important school committees. Each of these activities took time, and I had to keep working hard, and I met my goals. I graduated with many scholarships and honors, as well as a 3.88 GPA. I would not have had any of these accomplishments without a very big village of family and friends, who continue to support me. I come from a large Irish family. I type very slowly myself. I talk and other people write it down for me. My aunt did most of the college typing. My mom and grandparents advocated for me and provided personal care. I also had a host of other assistants.

As teachers, parents and leaders, you should investigate dreams and use those to create goals that do not focus on the things that the students can not do, but do focus on what they can do. I am not here to bash the government or any of the programs that are meant to support people with disabilities. Vocational rehabilitation pays for my aides and paid for most of my private education, but I encourage you to tell your students NOT to rely solely on the government. I found most of the opportunities I have had myself, through friends. That is how I found my part time writing position and social media editor for the Liipfert Law Group. If I had waited for the government to find me a job, I would still be waiting. I have plenty of volunteer positions that look good on a resume, but am still trying to find paid full time employment.

Another important thing is to help your students create relationships in the community. Find a way to get your students involved in the community. This will provide natural supports for them and their families. Government officials talk about people without disabilities as though they are completely independent and do not rely on anyone else for support. If you think about it, this is not true at all. We all buy goods and services, that we would not be able to provide for ourselves. We all have friends and most of us have family that provides us with support.

You should not have higher expectations for people with disabilities than you have for yourselves. We are all interdependent, as it should be.

People with disabilities want to be seen as human beings with likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and most importantly, individual goals and dreams. They want to have a choice. As I demonstrated earlier, I am involved in many of the state's organizations pertaining to people with developmental disabilities. One of the issues I'm most passionate about is the North Carolina Council of Developmental Disabilities. With their help and the help of the other partners in the DD network, we are forming a new statewide self-advocacy organization, called the North Carolina Empowerment Network. We recognize that there are a lot of good self-advocate groups. We want to be a good partner to them, and help with their activities and goals. One of the partnerships I'd like to see is with the North Carolina Youth Leadership program, which is a leadership development program for young people with disabilities designed to get them ready for post secondary life, whether that be college or work.

I'd like to see the graduate group of the program become involved with the NCEN. It would be good to harness that new energy, perhaps through specific involvement activities. Future generations need to be involved; their passion, uncontainable energy, harnessed ASAP. We harness their youthful energy and freshness, and partner it with experienced self-advocates like NCEN members, who develop and maintain a running agenda of engagement opportunities.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you all have, and I thank my colleagues on this panel for their time as well.