

March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018

**Re: Lift the Cap on Kids**

To The Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities,

For over 40 years, Stavros has been advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. We work tirelessly to remove systemic barriers which limit opportunities for persons with disabilities. Last year we served thousands with disabilities, helping to connect them with resources and remove barriers to education, recreation, transportation, and healthcare. We write ask for your immediate support to Lift the Cap on Kids.

The Cap on Kids – also called the family cap – denies TAFDC cash benefits to children conceived while (or soon after) their families receive benefits. It was adopted in Massachusetts in 1995 to deter women on welfare from having children. This rule is a failed policy, rooted in harmful stereotypes, which has negatively impacted families, and stripped resources from children for over a decade. Stavros joined the coalition to Lift the Cap on Kids because we believe the family cap has negative implications on both parents and children with disabilities.

Within the Supreme Court case of Buck v. Bell (1927), Justice Holmes reflected that forced sterilization of person with disabilities was constitutional if it prevented states from "being swamped with incompetence". Although the language around the family cap is not the same, the underlying intention to deter procreation remains. With this rule, women with disabilities are forced into poverty if their child is a "cap child". For those on Social Security and fixed income, they would be forced to use their funds to support their entire family; these funds are not intended to support an entire familial network. The Cap on Kids also has negative implications for families of children with disabilities. Families struggle to meet their children's basic needs to keep their children healthy. Diapers, medication, formula, and warm clothes in the winter are imperative to ensuring the health and wellness of all children. But for children with disabilities, limited access to basic resources, places an increased risk for infection. For children with complexed medical needs an infection can be life-threatening. It is shameful to punish sick children and forcing their families into deep poverty harms their health. It is time for the Cap on Kids to be lifted!

Stavros submits testimony because we strongly believe that women with disabilities should not be deterred from having children, limited financially, or forced into greater poverty because of their decision to expand their family. We also believe that children with disabilities should not have to face a lifetime of struggle because they live in poverty. We believe that our state is beyond Buck v. Bell, the stereotype of the welfare queen, and the notion of the deserving poor. We believe that our state is ready to do the right thing by Lifting the Cap on Kids. It is time that we move beyond the family cap and protect our states most vulnerable children and families.

Sincerely,

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