

With the governor's recent across-the-board budget cuts, which were endorsed by the silence coming from Republican legislators, I am deeply concerned for our state's future. What does it say about our priorities when those being hurt the most are our children, the disabled, and the elderly? It is becoming more difficult by the day to be a proud citizen of North Dakota. I co-own and work at an in-home daycare where most of the children are of special needs. We applied for the Child Care Aware grant and received \$15,000 to cover a portion of salary for additional staff who was to provide one on one care with our children. We recently learned that over one third of the grant was being taken away from us due to the cuts, leaving us scrambling to figure out where we go from here.

Our daycare has quite a few kids with special needs, a three-year-old with diabetes who needs insulin shots, pumps and all sorts of very expensive medicine. Her mom lost her MA and can barely afford to keep her daughter alive along with losing most of her state assistance in childcare. Most people that are on one assistance have more than one so by impacting all assistance they get hit more than once. We have two with autism one is 11 and only can get one hour of therapy a week, the other is five and does 13 hours a therapy a week and 15 hours of school for special needs a week. There is also a little girl in our daycare who needs help however they do not qualify for any and cannot afford it. Not a lot of daycares will care for children with special needs because they don't feel educated, they feel overwhelmed, or they simply don't want to put the extra work into it. It is heart breaking, where are these kids to go? The grant was amazing to help those willing to help these special needs kids and then it just gets cut.

This is don't only affect our daycare but our personal lives as well.

For me our family's world changed when my son was diagnosed with autism at 15 months old. No parent is prepared to learn their child can't talk, can't stand up without assistance, doesn't eat more than three foods, can't sleep, has unimaginable meltdowns, and doesn't know how to co-exist with peers. As a working mother, our one saving grace was the assistance we received to attend countless hours of sleep, behavioral, feeding and occupational, and so many other therapies that I can't even count.

Just as we were figuring out how to live our life, our world was once again turned upside down when the governor announced a billion dollars in cuts that directly impact working families. With those cuts, food is being taken off my child's plate, clothing off his back, and possibly shelter from over his head. His routine, which is of utmost importance for a child with autism, is being disrupted.

When I shared our story with a person in the governor's office, she told me that these cuts won't affect my son. With all due respect, that is simply not true.

The woman I spoke to in the governor's office said there was nothing Gov. Dalrymple can do to help us. Republican legislators have said there's nothing they can do to help. From what I've recently learned, none of that is true. As somebody who has never been involved in the political process before, I now know that Dem-NPL legislators have called for a brief special session to fund these critical needs for our state's future.

The very real impact these cuts have on my family and business have forced me to get involved. I plead with Republican legislators to join in the call for a special session, and I plead with Gov. Dalrymple to bring our legislators to Bismarck so that they can provide for this funding our working families so desperately need.

Shannon's story is a little different, she has two boys on the spectrum. One is about to graduate and the other is 11. She is fighting for her kids along with the other kids that need this help. Shannon's oldest son who is about to graduate went through some of the most difficult days any child has been through. For many years Shannon and her family struggled with not having a diagnosis and not knowing how to help her oldest. He got arrested 17 times because they believed that he was violent, no one knew he was autistic or that he needed some help with therapies. His life was overwhelming and he didn't know how to fix it, he would throw things, have meltdowns that looked like violent rages, and act totally out of control at times. Shannon ended up putting him in the Dakota Boys Ranch, her son was a ward of the state for one year. I can't imagine the pain in her heart driving away not knowing if you will ever see your child again, not knowing why he is acting the way he is acting or how to help him. At that time, she didn't have any help or any diagnosis, so as society would believe

he was a 'bad" seed. SO not true, this kid has a heart of gold. He is willing to help those in need and he is like a big brother to my five-year-old. He gets where he is coming from and wants him to never feel the way he felt growing up not knowing. Her oldest son is now going to graduate high school and move out on his own. This is scary, exciting and nerve wracking all at the same time. He will do great things,we believe in him. He will most likely struggle to get and hold a job and will fight tooth and nail to make a life for himself but he can do it. He could have been so much further ahead a long time ago had the help my son received been an option for him.

Now the 11-year-old, he is a good kid, has his issues of course and needs a little help. He only gets one hour of therapy a week, that is not enough. He has sensory issues and cannot handle all that life throws at him. He takes some things way out of content and acts like a small toddler when things don't go right, and other days he is the most helpful person you have met. Why should he have to struggle so hard to be able to be excepted by his peers and to just fit in. It's not right to take the services that help these kids make it through the day.

We understand that sometimes things need to be cut however according to my findings even though the cut was all across the board doesn't not meant that every service in every department was cut or needed to be cut. I understand things need to be moved around and some money needs to be cut but throughout DHS there are many programs that could have taken a little hit besides our kids and disabled. So many parents are trying so hard to make things work for their kids, busting their butts daily, working more than one job and it's still not enough. The cuts affect us all now,not later. The kids waiting to get on waivers and vouchers have been affected since day one when they were told sorry,spots are filled. The kids in daycare that have special needs and can't get the one on one that they need are affected. This doesn't not only affect the kids, the disabled, it affects the state in the long run. THIS IS THE NEXT GERNERATION! This is North Dakota's future,we need to put something into it to make something of it.