

## Penny Gardner Testimony House Bill 2405

Hello, my name is Penny Gardner. I am the parent of Bryan Gardner, an amazing, hardworking, young adult with a disability. I am here today to implore you to implement House Bill 2405 and provide the necessary funding for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to work with local education agencies and private employers to help students with disabilities successfully transition from school to competitive work.

Our family goal was for Bryan to have competitive employment five days a week after graduating from high school. Bryan had three years after completing his senior year of high school to transition from school to work. Our vision was for the last day of public education to look no different than the first day of the adult world. We thought three years was plenty of time to build upon the skills he had learned in 12 years of school to develop and train him for competitive employment. The first year would be a year to explore different types of employment through various unpaid internships in the community and determine what type(s) of work he was interested in and define his strengths. The second year would be narrowing down the type of work he liked and developing the skills needed to work at a particular job. In his third year, he would find an unpaid internship that would hopefully turn into competitive employment as he graduated or find a job in his field of interest. The last six months of school would be used to fine tuning his skills and working out the "bugs" so when he graduated there would be a seamless transition into the adult world.

Unfortunately the transition did not happen as planned. The current educational transition system failed my son miserably. He has no job and is "sitting on my couch" with nothing to do. Bryan was in a transition program designed to focus on the individual student's outcomes, including employment. The first year he had two unpaid internship opportunities. The first one was working in the laundry

department of a hotel which ended when they started remodeling the hotel. The next one was at a church working in the printing department. Bryan learned many skills and worked very well with the staff. That summer I decided he needed to work, so I arranged for him to continue to work at two internships during the entire summer break. He worked at the church and through my own networking I found him an unpaid clerical internship at a local organization.

In the second year of his transition program, I continued to push the school program to find internships related to Bryan's interests. Bryan liked clerical work, data entry, using the computer and printing. I was told by the school program supervisor it was hard to find clerical positions. The school program repeatedly told me it was not part of their program to find Bryan competitive employment. Bryan needed help improving his typing speed—I was told that was not part of the school program either. In the meantime, through my own networking I found Bryan a part-time data entry position working as a subcontractor for a small software company. This is a complex multi-step job where Bryan processes approximately 2,200 sewage payments in a two week period. He does not receive an hourly wage but instead gets paid for each payment he processes. Video link: <http://www.heyscotty.com/bryan-gardner.html>

We had Bryan's annual IEP meeting that May of 2013 with the OVR counselor and his supervisor in attendance. The IEP team requested OVR open a case but they declined saying it was too soon. They would open a case for Bryan six months before he graduated.

He started his last year of public education at the end of August 2013. The only work he had was the part time sewage payment processing job. I asked the school program repeatedly to look for a clerical, data entry, or printing internship or job. Finally in December 2013 after not getting any internship

opportunities from the school program, I decided to focus on Bryan becoming totally independent in his payment processing job. The IEP team met with the OVR counselor who finally agreed to open a case for Bryan since it was six months before he graduated. I found Bryan an office and he paid rent from January 2014 through April 2014 but he never worked in that office. When the team reconvened after the holidays, the school district said they would not support Bryan at the office because they did not have the job coaching staff to work the schedule that the job required. They would only provide support a couple of days a week during school hours. Bryan's case with OVR was open but the counselor said he could do nothing for Bryan since he was still in school. We had one final IEP meeting in April 2014. We reviewed all of Bryan's goals including the transition goal which stated he wanted to be competitively employed five days a week after completing high school. At that time the school district administrator stated if Bryan doesn't find employment for two years or five years that's okay. It was no big deal.

So my son sits on my couch losing the skills he acquired while in school. He waits while I go through the list of supported employment agencies that work with OVR to find one agency that will help him find competitive employment.

In all fairness to school districts, a high school special education teacher working full time in a classroom does not have the time to try and network in the community for internship opportunities. Even if they find businesses in the community that will give a student with a disability a chance, they cannot support that individual at that job if they are teaching full time in a classroom.

This is why it is so important for House Bill 2405 to be passed so students with disabilities can have a seamless transition from school to competitive employment.