

**The Arc of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change
FY'09 Budget Priorities**

**FLEXIBLE FAMILY SUPPORT
Department of Mental Retardation
Line Item 5920-3000**

The Issue

This DMR funded program serves an unduplicated count of 13,247 families (estimated April 2007). That count includes 4,600 adults and 8,647 children under 18. The Family Support account is reserved for those individuals who live at home with their families. People with cognitive disabilities have a range of issues. Families generally ask for only those supports that will keep the family together and reduce the stress of raising a child with a disability: respite; adaptive clothing (diapers, shoes); adaptive equipment (shower stalls, ramps, furniture); in home support; support for community inclusion - whatever it takes to keep the family member comfortable in the family home as well as productive and engaged in their community. Flexible Family Support is considered one of the most cost effective programs in the Commonwealth. Families report that the limited supports they receive have been the pivotal reason the family member is able to stay at home.

The Impact

It is common for people with multiple disabilities living with their families to go into crisis. Marriages dissolve, caretakers get sick, able bodied children feel ignored. The funding for this program helps families endure crises and remain intact. When supports are not available, families seek alternative care for their loved one. For children, they may go into a residential school; for adults, the family may request a 24/7 community residential placement. The cost differential between keeping a person with a serious disability at home with their family vs. moving into a residential placement can be astronomical. Private residential placements can easily reach \$150,000 per year. Adult residential programs are in the vicinity of \$65,000 per year. In contrast, most families receiving Flexible Family Supports cost the state less than \$1000.00 per year.

Though the Family Support program serves the largest number of individuals, the funding allocated is less than five percent of the Department of Mental Retardation budget. Other than \$500,000 added in the FY '06 budget, this account had been level funded for the past eight years. However, there is a serious waiting list and many young families have no idea that such a program exists to help them. A 3000 family wait list is estimated by state officials.

Action Requested

An investment of \$3,000,000 will reach a minimum of 1500 families, half of the existing wait list. Fund line 5920-3000 at \$\$58,044,228 to support families raising their family members with disabilities at home.