Senator Robyn Kennedy, Chair September 9, 2025

Representative Jay Livingstone, Chair

Senator Liz Miranda, Vice Chair

Representative Judith Garcia, Vice Chair

Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

Massachusetts State House

Boston, MA 02133

**Re: H.261/S.155 An Act relative to authorizing supported decision-making agreements for certain adults with disabilities**

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

My name is Cody Rooney, and I live in Amherst, MA. I am an appointed Citizen Member and Vice Chair of the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC), where our mission is to provide opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities and families to enhance independence, productivity and inclusion. I am writing to you on behalf of the MDDC to share the importance of this legislation, **H.261/S.155 An Act relative to authorizing supported decision-making agreements for certain adults with disabilities.**

I experience cerebral palsy, and I am currently a college student at the University of Massachusetts pursuing a degree in Political Science. I enjoy being the front seat driver of my life and being able to make a difference whether it’s in the classroom or out in the community. Like anyone, I value the right to make choices about where I want to go, what I want to wear, what I want to eat, etc. I also value overseeing my own educational journey.

I encounter discrimination daily. People make assumptions about my capabilities and underestimate me because of my disability due to the way I talk and move. Societal disability stereotypes are often based on misinformation and are harmful to people with disabilities.  Stereotypes can result in prejudice and exclusion like presuming we are totally helpless, unable to care for ourselves, or unable to make our own decisions.

I fought very hard to find my voice and be allowed to have my voice heard. It’s a struggle because people with disabilities must fight tooth and nail to have the right to decide what happens in their life. Some people today still believe we are not capable of making choices and I am here to tell you that we can. We deserve the right and dignity like anyone else to make decisions and have autonomy over our lives.

SDM is an alternative to guardianship, a legal option for adults with disabilities who seek assistance in making life decisions but would like to retain their legal rights. SDM agreements are a useful tool already being used successfully in more than 20 other states. SDM describes the process most of us already use to make decisions. Some people need more assistance, and others need less help to make life decisions. SDM agreements allow people with disabilities to select a trusted group of supporters and tailor their agreement to meet their individual needs.

***The proposed SDM policy is specifically designed to prevent abuse*** and has more built-in safeguards than the current process used to establish a healthcare proxy or power of attorney. Unlike guardianship, SDM agreements involve multiple people and require mandatory reporting in the event there is ***any suspected*** abuse, neglect or exploitation by a supporter or supporters as an added protection.

This legislation is important because it will empower and ensure the dignity of many people with disabilities.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cody Rooney