

**TO: General Assembly Government Administration and Elections
Committee**
**RE: Raised House Bill 7144,
AN ACT ESTABLISHING A BOARD OF EDUCATION AND
SERVICES FOR CITIZENS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM
DISORDERS**
DATE: March 16, 2007

Good Morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Eda diBiccari and I live in Simsbury. I am the mother of a son who was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome in 1995. Asperger's Syndrome is one name given to people on the high functioning end of the autism spectrum.

I want to thank Rep. Mary Fritz for introducing House Bill 7144, and the Committee for raising this important legislation.

My son Nick was first observed by a Birth -to-Three worker who visited his daycare center in 1992. She noticed he wasn't interacting with the other kids the way a more typical three year old child will. We were very fortunate because we live in Simsbury and they had a new preschool for children with special needs. To be honest, I didn't want to think that our son was anything but absolutely perfect. Nick is smart, verbal and creative but these same traits got him into trouble in the school setting when he became frustrated or stressed out. Nick had a sensitivity to loud noises and he didn't tolerate changes in his routine well. Even taking Nick to the barbershop was a dreaded event because he had trouble sitting still without fidgeting.

Over the years we struggled to find after school care and summer programs that would meet our son's needs. There was an after school program at his elementary school but it was run by a private company and the staff were young people who just were not trained to understand the mind of a child with autism. My son is very bright and they mistakenly assumed he had more control over his behavior. When he started to get frustrated or anxious they were unable to read

the signals he was giving. Sometimes he would just bolt. He was asked to leave the program.

After trying to find babysitters, we ended up hiring someone to drive our son from Simsbury to Farmington to attend the daycare center at UCONN where the staff had begun to be trained in working with kids on the high end of the Autism Spectrum. The staff at UConn's Creative Child Center were wonderful but when Nick graduated we were without proper after school care again.

While in school Nick received the help of excellent teachers and paraprofessionals and therapists. They also helped to educate the other teachers and the administrators but when school was out there were still gaps. Summers were especially frustrating. There were no camps in CT that specialized in kids with Asperger's Syndrome. Even one that advertised that they took kids with special needs couldn't work with Nick. I finally located a program in Canton called Focus Alternative Learning Center. They specialize in kids who are "creatively wired but socially challenged". They did one on one therapy with Nick and they used milieu therapy to teach social skills. Unfortunately this kind of program is not cheap and is beyond the reach of many families. Although he received therapy at the program my insurance company would not pay for it. They did however send me a check made out to the sum of zero.

My son has really benefited from the expertise of our school system and I feel very lucky and very proud. He is a high school senior now. He has consistently made the honor roll and is liked by his teachers. He no longer needs the services of a paraprofessional. He has been accepted into three colleges. However he still has no close friends. He is still teased and still struggles with knowing exactly how to act in social situations. Despite his tremendous academic progress, I am concerned about his making his way in the world without some supports in place. He currently has a part-time job as a stock clerk. I want to see him reach his goal of becoming a teacher.

So many other families in this state are not as fortunate as we have been. I urge you on their behalf, as well as Nick's, to make this initiative a priority. One agency that coordinates services for kids and adults on the spectrum would help fill those gaps and assure that individuals reach their full potential.

Thank-you for taking the time to listen to me today and thank-you for all your efforts.

Eda diBiccari
P.O. Box 324
West Simsbury, CT 06092
(860) 651-7007