

**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

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

My name is Florence Bourque, and I am retired from the Marlborough Public School District. I want to thank Rep. Mary Fritz for introducing House Bill 7144, and the Committee for raising this important legislation. Our members in CSEA/SEIU Local 2001 who have retired from public education and adult vocational rehabilitation believe that with appropriate services, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) can grow, thrive, and live independently while contributing to our communities. This legislation will go a long way to serve children and adults with ASD by creating a new autism-specific State agency to provide families the best care and education possible.

As a public school music teacher for 28 years, I can tell you that the State is overwhelmed by the growing need for credentialed teachers and support paraprofessionals for the growing autism crisis. The fact is that many local school districts are finding it difficult to provide federally mandated services to special needs students, and that leaves too many families to look to the private sector.

As a grandmother of three boys with diagnoses on the autism spectrum, I can tell you as well that there is a the maze of barriers that stand in the way of parents getting information on services for their children with autism.

Our daughter and son-in law are fortunate to live in a community with a district that provides services for students with autism. The boys have received the one-on-one attention and specialized development all kids with ASD need.

In fact, the youngest of my grandchildren was just transferred from State-provided Birth-to-Three services this past June. However, their parents had to research available options and be advocates for the children in asking for these services.

I must tell you that the paraprofessionals all three boys have had working side-by-side with them in their local schools have been so important to their progress. They are the bridge between the parents and the teacher...and the children and the world around them. Without paraprofessionals in the classroom, these kids would be left stuck on an island of neglect.

The State Department of Education should provide on-going, in-service training for all local school paraprofessionals, and the new agency this bill is proposing could make sure that every public school classroom has the teachers and paraprofessionals who receive the additional training in dealing with students with ASD they need.

This new agency could be a central repository of information on services available to families of children and adults with autism. By investing in our State education professionals, we will also bring the oversight needed so local schools can deliver high quality specialized education and development for children with ASD. The return on our investment can save Connecticut's taxpayers by providing individuals with autism spectrum disorders the opportunity to grow, thrive, and live independently while contributing to the communities in which they live and work.

Thank-you for your time and for hearing my voice on this critical matter.

Florence Bourque

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