

TESTIMONY TO STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
RE HOUSE BILL 5483
**AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LIFESPAN RESPITE
COALITION**

My name is Jadine Finch. I am the parent of a seven-year-old daughter, Sydney, who has Autism, and I am here today because I am in favor of House Bill 5483.

My family utilizes respite services to help Sydney remain safe in our home as well as out in the community. Although she is seven years old chronologically, Sydney is functioning at a much lower level. Her ability to communicate is severely limited, and she has difficulty with motor planning, coordination, and execution of simple tasks. Sydney is a child who has consistently required a highly individualized, intensive approach to addressing her learning and behavioral needs in all settings.

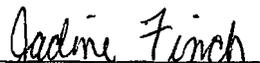
She has no appreciation of danger, and she has become a flight risk. As a result, we have deadbolts on every door in our home. If she were to get out of the house alone and wander away (most likely towards a swimming pool or pond), she would not be able to find her way back home nor would she be capable of telling someone her name, address, or phone number. She does not yet understand about street safety and how moving cars and trucks could be harmful. Her need for constant supervision by adults, both in school and at home, would be overwhelming if it were not for the respite services we receive.

Sydney has substantial communication deficits that restrict her ability to express her needs and wants. This often leads to behavioral challenges when she becomes frustrated or overwhelmed. As a result, opportunities to provide her with integrated experiences in the community were often disastrous prior to receiving support in the form of respite services. Her disruptive behaviors in public along with her difficulty to communicate make it extremely challenging for others to take her into the community. Prior to receiving respite assistance, my husband and I were the only ones who would take her out of the home. Sydney has a hard time generalizing skills she's learned from one person to another, and experiencing the community with her respite provider gives her the opportunity to practice skills with someone other than her parents. Having respite benefits our whole family.

Sydney is now able to go out into the community with her respite provider and do simple errands (post office, pharmacy, convenience store) with great success. She is beginning to understand the meaning of waiting in line, paying for an item or service, getting change, and continuing on. Her respite provider has worked tirelessly to increase her tolerance of new situations (such as restaurants), and we can now go out together for a family meal; something which was not possible in the past.

Over time, and with the assistance of respite workers, we have been able to increase Sydney's exposure to everyday, functional activities. It is clear to me how invaluable this service is for my family, and I believe other families with special needs members could benefit as well. It is my hope that Sydney will improve her safety skills and continue to make progress at home and in community settings so that she can become an active member of society.

Thank you for your time,



Jadine Finch, Parent

Feb. 6, 2007