

## HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE – BILL 7280

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of raised bill 7280 – a Medicaid Waiver bill to provide services for adults with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder who do not have Mental Retardation. I am here on behalf of my teenage son who is challenged with an ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder). I am also here on behalf of several families who have children similar to mine – many of whom are currently in crisis.

I have been blessed with two children – a 14 year-old with ASD and a ten year old without a disability. Like most parents, I have great hopes for my children's future. And like most parents, I also worry about their future. Will they stay drug-free? Make healthy and wise choices? Become responsible, successful, contributing citizens? Most parents, including my husband and I, will do all we can throughout our lives – financially and otherwise- to support both our children and guide them in that positive aim.

But there is a difference – a very important distinction – that we as parents with a disabled child, such as my son, must face. The difference we must face is in knowing that most children – including my daughter- will NOT require the kind of support that children similar to my son will as they move beyond their school years and into the independent working world of adulthood. That is the reality. My son is not intellectually disabled. And although he has many skills and talents, he nonetheless has significant challenges inherent in his lifelong ASD. These challenges are very intrusive in his life, despite his average IQ. Moreover, these challenges, unique to ASD individuals, often become MORE, not less intrusive as that individual transitions into adulthood. Consequently, an individual like my son requires specific, individualized supportive services early in the young adult years in order to have a chance at successfully leading an independent, fully functional, employable

life. This is support that my husband and I cannot necessarily provide; although we continue to do all we can to prepare him for independent adulthood so as to minimize any supportive services he will require as an adult. This is the same scenario for many families across the state. With small supports, the outcome for these folks can be more than promising.

And so, we are hopeful for our son's future but highly concerned for him and others like him.

We are confident that our son will do well in life if given continued appropriate supports.

But – the support is key. We are concerned because currently, there is a dire shortage of qualified individuals able to provide the right kind of support for folks like him. So, even if families could afford services, without a funding source in place, the providers are limited.

We are concerned because we know that the provision of even minimal supports will give these individuals the harness they need to be fully functional, productive, and independent.

We are concerned because we know that many families with older ASD children are presently in **CRISIS**, living unnecessary marginal lives, despite their child's normal/above IQs, special talents, and great strengths.

Let us not delay in helping to provide these otherwise capable people the opportunity to seize what life has to offer. I come before you today to urge you to act swiftly in passing bill 7280.

These folks have much to give in return.

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