

Good afternoon, my name is Constance Frishman. I have lived in Stonington with my husband Glenn and our two children for 35 years. I am here today to speak on behalf of Raised Bill No. 7280, An Act Concerning Autism. Our son James, 26 years old who has Asperger's Syndrome has never held a full time job.

Eighty-Five percent of all children afflicted with Autism are mentally retarded, the remaining 15% have Asperger's Syndrome. You must possess an average to above average intelligence (IQ) to have Asperger's. I stress this point because of the misinformation and certain "catch phrases" such as high functioning which are muddying the water and making it even more difficult for the general population to understand these unique individuals.

Fact: only 1% of all people who have Asperger's Syndrome are employed. Unfortunately my son James is among them. It is not due to lack of education. My son graduated cum laude from Connecticut College and received his Masters Degree in Library Science and Information Services becoming a member of Kappa Delta Pi, an honor society. He passed the Connecticut State Librarians exam.

Prior to his entrance into graduate school we, his parents, had him evaluated by an expert in his disability to determine whether Jim's career choice combined with his disability would produce a successful field of work. It was determined that not only was it a positive choice, it would be a perfect fit combined with his strengths.

One might ask how can a person accomplish so much at college and struggle in the world of work? Education is very structured with clear expectations such as a syllabus. There is

support: tutors, conferences or mentoring with professors and grad students. Modifications for students with disabilities are also used. A student is taught and graded on the knowledge of their profession but not on how to deal with the work environment which is where the Asperger's population struggles.

One does not learn in college all the subtle expectations that are inherent in any work or social environment. They need job skill development, help to adapt to the workplace environment, feedback and mentoring. The expectation of each service is to teach the client how to compensate for the disability but understand the disability cannot be removed. A disability is from womb to tomb.

A modification is meant to "level the playing field" without lowering the bar. Individuals with Asperger's should not be expected to take jobs of those with less ability because of an unwillingness on the part of employers to make appropriate accommodations.

When our son graduated with his BA he applied for a job in data entry. Since Jim had been typing since 3rd grade and could type 65 words per minute he felt confident he would be a strong candidate. There were openings on both shifts which Jim was willing to work. On the application they asked if he had any disability that would interfere with his doing the job.

Jim, being very honest wrote Asperger's Syndrome. When he was called for the interview, they asked him what it was and how it would affect him on the job. He told them that when he gets a direction, it takes him a little bit longer to understand it. He was never offered a job.

After graduate school he volunteered at a local library. He worked four days per week and tried different jobs to gain experience. He gained speed and was willing to help in any way he could. When he was looking for jobs on the internet he became excited when he saw a job opening for a library assistant at the very library he was volunteering at. He became hopeful. I was disappointed knowing that he was being overlooked because of his disability. They said a previous employee was returning which proved to be untrue. The library was unwilling to give Jim the extra time and mentoring he would need due to his disability.

When Jim was in graduate school he needed to do an internship. He interviewed at a Connecticut State University. Once he began the internship the director found out that Jim had Asperger's. He, the director, told his job coach that he would never have given Jim the internship if he knew he had Asperger's.

I could continue if I had more time. What will happen to my son? How will he be able to live on his own, enjoy an independent life, or support himself? I see adults who are mentally retarded who are working to their potential and living on their own. They are successful because employers are willing to adapt their expectations. This does not appear to be the case for people with Aspergers.

If the state does not open jobs for people with Asperger's Syndrome why should the private sector? Can you help stop this discrimination? I am willing to help in any way I can but I will not be able to be here for my son forever. Help these adults become taxpayers so they can help Connecticut become a greater state.

