

Jane Thierfeld Brown

Bill 7280

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I am Jane Thierfeld Brown, a resident of West Hartford and a staff member at the University of Connecticut School of Law, the Director of Student Services. In my work I am responsible for services to students with disabilities. In my personal life, I am parent to 3 children, one of whom has autism.

My field of expertise is higher education and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Our most recent national research shows that 4 year colleges and universities have an average of 4.2 students with Asperger's Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder. Community Colleges have an average of 8.9 students in this population. These numbers are very low and even lower in CT. We know that Connecticut citizens would be better served for life-long employment and independence if they had the necessary service and supports to get to and be successful in higher education, trade school or job training. These supports are being provided with our pilot program in CT and need to be continued and made more available throughout the state. Our students with Autism Spectrum

Disorders are unemployed and under employed creating more stress on families and even more need for services.

In New Jersey there are Regional Centers funded to oversee these services for adults on the Spectrum. In Minnesota where I presently co-direct a program for students with Asperger's syndrome, we work cooperatively with middle school and high school students and their teachers and support staff to transition and support students in the best way possible. Unfortunately in CT, we are grossly behind the times. Progress has been made in many states where students are evaluated in high school and post secondary plans for education or work, are not just give lip service, but actually supported by state services. Without such service, how can we expect anything but an undereducated population of bright young people who cannot realize their potential. The President of the University of Minnesota supports our program at his institution. He believes that students on the Autism spectrum with their unusual vision of the world are our next great thinkers, when they accept their Nobel Peace Prizes and McArthur genius awards, he would like them to be alumni of the University of Minnesota. What a progressive way of thinking.

With the tireless work of people like Lois Rosenwald, we have gotten where we are today, we need to get much further. The state of CT needs to support it's

citizens and their families. We need support beyond the high school diploma for students on the Autism Spectrum, 1 in 150. Think about these numbers. When I began this research 10 years ago, schools would have 1 or 2 students on the spectrum. I now work with colleges and universities that have 20 to 30 students on the spectrum. These young people and their families do not need to be poor and begging. We need support and services through education and job training. These are citizens who can give back to the state of CT if they are given the chance to be a part of a way of life they so richly deserve.

My son is very low functioning, he will not be going on to higher education, he attends River Street School in Windsor, an excellent school that has taught me a lot about transition and support. The citizens of CT who are higher functioning deserve support that is equally excellent. Please pass Bill 7280 and make CT one of the states that believes all our citizens can contribute to our society. Thank you.

