

To the Human Services Committee, re HB 7280, AAC Autism

From: Jeanne D. Miner, 556 Ridge Road, Wethersfield, CT, on March 13, 2007

I have witnessed up close and personal the human and societal cost of NOT having appropriate servicing for someone on the spectrum.

My brother-in-law grew up before Asperger's was a known diagnosis in the United States. Though of above average intelligence, Brian barely graduated from high school because of behavioral issues that, interestingly enough, would scarcely cause a raised eyebrow in many schools today. Nevertheless, his poor social skills made him the kind of kid that no high school administrator could love. Like so many persons on the spectrum, simply making eye contact with any human being was extremely difficult, and he never had the opportunity for the kind of intervention that a school system today would give him to overcome that.

Thanks to the intervention of a kind uncle in Orono, Maine, my Brian did get his high school diploma. Living at home, he would find jobs, typically low-paying, usually without benefits. Occasionally, he would try to live in an apartment with a friend; again, his poor social skills and inflexible thinking made these attempts at more independent living fail.

So, Brian eventually found himself a niche. He worked part-time in a car wash, where they appreciated his reliability. My in-laws constituted most of his social world. Occasionally, he would be hospitalized briefly for severe depression. Luckily, the car wash would always take him back. Due to his depression and his extremely low income, at some point, he got onto SAGA, so thank God, his medical bills were paid.

Then, the big crisis occurred. First my mother-in-law, then my father-in-law, died. As executor of the estate, my husband sold his parents' house and the entire estate, modest as it was, was split down the middle. With the help of an angelic town social worker in Cheshire, Brian was practically peeled from the house he had lived in for fifty years. She also found him a very low-priced condo in Waterbury, which he paid for in toto when he reluctantly moved in 1994.

Brian was too angry at my husband for selling their parents house ever to come to us for help until he'd gotten in so big a hole we couldn't help him get out of it. Even though he could have maintained himself in his new place with careful spending, he had no idea how to budget. The thousands of dollars that he had inherited were spent on first-class vacations. When it was too late, we found out he was deeply in arrears not only in his monthly payments on the condo, but in city taxes. We found all his old bills stuffed between the cushions of his sofa.

So, first he lost his phone service, never to get it back; then he lost the condo. Good, caring people in DSS and at the Independent Living Center were able to get him an apartment where he could still commute to work, but his continuing inability to manage his money landed him in the same hole once again—in arrears in Section 8 housing, and now with severe health problems due to years of smoking and living on junk food.

Brian has never been able to get the services targeted to someone with his special issues. These basically educational interventions could have kept him independent and fully functioning, even paying his taxes. Instead, he is now a complete burden on the government. He is on SSI, living in an intermediate level of care facility in Waterbury.

I cry when I think what a few dollars invested in Brian in brief doses over the years could have done for him. A professional who understood Brian's social difficulties could have helped him through those roommate issues that sank his efforts to strike out on his own when he was in his thirties and forties. When he had to move into his own place after his father's death, he clearly needed temporary intervention on independent living issues like budgeting, diet and actually writing out checks when you get your bills instead of stuffing them into the sofa.

I also live in fear when I think of Brian. Because, as is often the case when one family member has Asperger's, there is another young man in my family who is likely to hit a wall at various times in *his* future. And his parents won't always be there to step in and keep him from a possible disastrous descent into depression and destitution.

No matter what happens with this bill, it may be too late for Brian. But I implore you to provide the safety net for the many Connecticut citizens who shouldn't needlessly share Brian's fate.