



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
JAMES A. AMANN

Human Services Committee PUBLIC HEARING
March 13, 2007

Testimony by House Speaker James Amann
in SUPPORT of

HOUSE BILL NO. 7280 AN ACT CONCERNING AUTISM

H.B. 7280 would require the Commissioner of Social Services to take action to secure Medicaid funding for home and community-based services for adults with autism spectrum disorders, but who do not have mental retardation.

Representative Villano, Senator Harris, and members of the committee:

I come before you today to express my strong support for **House Bill No. 7280, An Act Concerning Autism**. Last year I supported, and the legislature championed a groundbreaking two year pilot program to provide needed services to twenty-five individuals with autism spectrum disorders in the New Haven County area. To date, the pilot program has been extremely successful. I would like to thank the many legislators and advocates that played a part in its passage, especially State Representative Cathy Abercrombie and Senator Judith Freedman. But, the real champions are the parents who work tirelessly for the well being of their children.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities caused by unusual brain development. People with ASDs tend to have problems with social and communication skills. **ASDs begin during childhood and last throughout a person's life.**

The latest Center for Disease Control study estimates that 1 in 150 newborn babies have an autism spectrum disorder. Autism is currently the fastest-growing developmental disability. In the 1990's the United State's population increase was 13%, disabilities as a whole increased by 16%, autism had an increase of 172%.

Autism spectrum disorders occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Presently, there is no known single cause of autism; studies are underway to explore different explanations for the various types of autism. Recently, Senator Christopher Dodd helped obtain federal money to research a cure.

One of the most challenging times for individuals with autism, and their families, is when they transition from the security of federally-mandated services in the public schools to the uncertainty of adult services. H.B. 7280 is targeted to help the adult population. Autism spectrum disorders are life long conditions, yet adults with autism in Connecticut receive very few services. Entitlement services for people with autism ends at age 21 in Connecticut unless the person also has mental retardation. A large percentage of people with autism do not have mental retardation and therefore are left with no or very few services.

This bill would require that the Commissioner of Social Services, in consultation with the Commissioner of Mental Retardation take all necessary steps, such as applying for Medicaid waivers, to secure federal funding to provide home and community-based support services to adults with autism spectrum disorders who do not have mental retardation. This will ensure long-term funding of services for these individuals, and the federal dollars to do so.

Funding for services for these adults would allow them to live independent lives. By providing post-secondary education, vocational training, supported employment, and other services they will be active and contributing members in the community. It is my hope that we will be able to appropriate funding in this years biennium budget to start providing these services while DSS and DMR are applying and obtaining federal funds. I will look to the leadership of this committee and the appropriations committee to study that feasibility.

Thank you for your time and consideration in support of bill H.B. 7280. I look forward to working with the committee members as the process moves forward.