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Testimony of Jeanne Milstein, Child Advocate
Before the Committee on Human Services
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Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and members of the Committee. I am Jeanne Milstein, the Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of **House Bill No. 7280, "An Act Concerning Autism."** This effort underscores a grave indifference to a population of individuals who, for want of certain supports or services, are unable to fully participate in their communities. I am speaking about individuals with developmental disabilities, without mental retardation. I'm talking about children with autism, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy. It is estimated that out of 250 births, 1 child will have autism. Connecticut has experienced a great deal of success through Home and Community Based Waivers provided to persons with Developmental Disabilities who have mental retardation. Those children have been able to remain living in their homes, attend schools and be a part of their community because of the flexibility the waiver offers them in insurance coverage and access to supports. But without a diagnosis of mental retardation – this option is not available. It is no different for adults. So why am I supporting legislation that deals with adults?

Our office is extremely concerned about the population of children with autism who are aging into adulthood and out of services. Without appropriate supports and given their extreme vulnerability, young adults are at risk for all kinds of dangerous possibilities.

As the Child Advocate, I support the bill because children who have autism but not mental retardation and who currently receive services through the special education system, and perhaps some very limited services under Title V, cannot be appropriately transitioned to adulthood because there are no services available to them once they complete their education or reach the age of 21. As a result, even after significant progress in school, these young adults suddenly begin to fail. This is an unacceptable tragedy, not just for them, but also for their families and for our state.

Children and young adults with autism spectrum disorders demonstrate a range of abilities. Many have high IQ scores and experience academic success. Their strengths include such things as exceptionally good long-term memory, visual thinking, ability to perform highly precise tasks, perfectionism, reliability in adherence to rules or schedules, honesty, and integrity. Despite these strengths and the ability to live productive, independent lives, these young adults often do not transition successfully into adulthood because they have not developed the kinds of skills that you and I use to navigate our social environment. Abilities most people take for granted, like crossing the street, deciding where and when to eat lunch at work, or introducing one's self to a potential employer can present major obstacles to navigating the work force for these otherwise very capable people.

Here in my office, we see the two often tragic results of not providing these services to young adults. We have seen countless numbers of young adults who do not succeed upon reaching adulthood; too many in homeless shelters, too many in the criminal justice system.

It makes moral and economic sense to provide these services. Minimal financial cost of services and significant benefits of providing such services. Services for persons with autism spectrum disorders cost approximately \$10,000 to \$19,000 per year. For a person with autism spectrum disorder without mental retardation, social and independent living skills training can move a person with autism spectrum disorder from an isolated existence at home to a full, productive life in the work force. They deserve nothing less.

Thank you