

February 26, 2007

Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Judy LaRosa and I live in West Hartford with my husband and four sons, ages 6 to 14. I am here today to strongly support House Bill 5760 on behalf of my two sons Zachary and Jeffrey LaRosa. It is important that you note that while all four of my boys passed both their school screenings and pediatric visit vision screenings, two of my sons have vision problems that were only detected through a complete eye examination. That is a 50% failure rate for vision screenings for my family, and why I am here today to speak to you on behalf of my children and all other children who do not have a voice at today's hearing.

It all started in October of 2005 when my oldest son Zachary, then age 13, was complaining of daily headaches after school. As a result of Zack's complaints, I brought my three oldest boys into Dr. Lambright's office for their first official eye examinations. At the time my boys were 13, 10, and 7 and they had had only routine school and pediatric vision assessments up until this point. Dr. Lambright determined that Zachary's headaches were a result of uncorrected refractive error that was not found during school screenings and pediatric visits. Thankfully, Zachary's headaches resolved once he was prescribed the proper eyeglass prescription.

At that visit, I told Dr. Lambright that this was the first complete eye examination that any of my children had ever had, and I was curious if I should have been having my children's eyes checked on an annual basis if they weren't complaining. At that point, she explained the importance and necessity of early detection of eye issues and that it is recommended that children have their first eye exam before one year of age. I was feeling really guilty at that point, but was determined not to wait, as I had with Zack, before getting complete eye examinations for all of my boys.

In November of 2006 I brought all of my sons to Dr. Lambright's for their annual eye exams, including my youngest son Jeffrey, age 6. Jeffrey had passed both his school and pediatric visit screenings, but unlike Zachary hadn't complained about any eye related issues. I was really fulfilling my commitment to myself by taking all of the boys for an annual eye examination after discovering Zachary's issue and listening to Dr. Lambright's advice. On my way to the exam for Jeffrey, I had called my husband to just check in and remind him where I was and that he needed to get home for the other boys. He was a little annoyed by the craziness of the evening and said "Why are you taking Jeffrey to the eye doctor anyway? Is this really necessary?" I responded simply that yes, I thought it important that all the boys get checked out. At that exam Dr. Lambright discovered that Jeffrey's vision was 20/20 in his right eye and 20/70 in his left eye. You can just imagine the change in my husband's tone when I called and asked him to stop by for a minute to help pick out Jeffrey's glasses. Dr. Lambright prescribed him glasses and his left eye improved from 20/70 to 20/30. Jeffrey's vision in his left eye would have remained 20/30 and Jeffrey would be amblyopic, an absolutely unnecessary condition,

had we not caught this early. Thankfully Jeffrey's vision in his left eye has improved to 20/20 three months later only because we were able to catch it during his critical period of development, which is birth to age seven.

I cannot tell you how many people stop and comment on how handsome Jeffrey looks with his new glasses. Interestingly enough, they always follow-up with the question "How did you know Jeffrey needed glasses?" and thankfully I reply, "Unfortunately, I didn't, it was caught by an annual eye exam" Most of the folks who inquire state that they too haven't had their children's eyes formally examined because the kids have no complaints. I am curious about that, we have well child visits at the pediatrician and dentist before starting Kindergarten and the children aren't complaining prior to those visits either. I wonder how long it would have taken Jeffrey to mention that he thought there was something wrong with his left eye, or to mention that he had headaches brought on by stressed eyes, or how long it would have taken us to figure out why he was struggling in school. I feel so fortunate that Jeffrey was spared all of the possible long term effects of being amblyopic, and that he is a thriving kindergartener who proudly tells everyone that his glasses are helping to "wake-up" his left eye!

We must not accept a 50% failure rate for school screening for my children or anyone's children. Please support House Bill 5760 on behalf of Zachary, Jeffrey and all other children that do not have a voice at today's hearing. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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