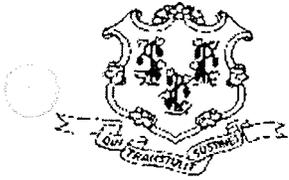


STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL RETARDATION



M. JODI RELL
GOVERNOR

PETER H. O'MEARA
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY OF
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL RETARDATION
COMMISSIONER PETER H. O'MEARA
TO THE
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 16, 2007

Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am Commissioner Peter O'Meara, and on behalf of the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) I am submitting testimony on **H.B. 7144, An Act Establishing a Board of Education and Services for Citizens with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**.

I would like to offer the Committee some information on DMR's role in addressing the important service needs for individuals with ASD in Connecticut. Pursuant to Section 37 of Public Act 06-188, the Department of Mental Retardation was charged with establishing a pilot program for individuals who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). One million dollars was appropriated in the budget for FY07 to provide services for up to 50 individuals with ASD who do not also have mental retardation and therefore are not currently eligible for services from DMR. Governor Rell has recommended the continuation of this funding for the second year of the pilot in FY08. DMR's Autism Coordinator, Kathryn Reddington, has provided updates to the legislature as appropriate on the progress of the pilot and this information is available on the DMR's website.

Kathy Reddington was hired as DMR's Autism Coordinator in early January 2006. Responsibilities for this position were agreed upon by legislative leaders and DMR. These responsibilities include coordinating the various components of developing a program plan and system design for adults with autism, including but not limited to: researching opportunities for grants and federal waivers; examining previous reports and studies already completed on this topic; coordinating with other state agencies the opportunities and best way to serve this population; reviewing and updating previous findings and recommendations regarding serving individuals with autism; establishing a service coordination plan and developing a supported employment program plan. The position was established to coordinate and collaborate with existing department staff, other state agencies that can best serve individuals with autism and various stakeholders. This may include maximizing available resources for individuals with autism in Connecticut. The funding was also intended to support training service opportunities to providers or individuals who provide support to adults with autism.

As we have testified in the past, DMR would be happy to be involved in any potential coordination of resources and services for individuals with autism, but must caution that the

solution to this problem in its entirety involves significant resources. DMR is requesting that those involved in the development and implementation of the current Autism Pilot Program be given time to analyze the data collected from and related to the pilot before creating a new agency as intended by this bill. This level of analysis will not be complete until January of 2009, after the 2-year pilot has been carried out. Connecticut should proceed carefully and assure that any attempt to address this important issue for individuals with autism in Connecticut is well designed and thought out. We must be careful not to create an expectation of services without the appropriate commensurate funding by the Legislature, through the budget process, to support this population in the future. In addition, any implications (fiscal or administrative) must be carefully considered and appropriately budgeted for.

We believe that addressing the needs of individuals with Autism in Connecticut is important, and DMR is proud of the role that we have been able to play through the implementation of the 2-year pilot that is currently underway. We look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts with the advocacy community, the Governor and the legislature as we continue to determine how to best address the needs of individuals with Autism in Connecticut and their families.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill. You may contact DMR's Legislative Program Manager, Christine Pollio at 418-6066 with any questions.