

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Bill no. 7280. My name is Michael Storz. I am here today as a citizen of Connecticut and as the Executive Vice President for Chapel Haven, a nonprofit agency based in New Haven.

I would like to begin by commending this Committee for directing its energies toward today's hearings. For too long, adults with autism spectrum disorders, who are not mentally retarded, have tried to overcome the many challenges that complicate and interfere with their ability to live independent and meaningful lives. Currently, family is their only resource and hope. For some this may mean a life of isolation and poverty.

Unfortunately, interventions, therapies, medications, medical care and other necessary support services come at a high cost. Many families find themselves mortgaging their homes to ensure that their child has the best possible care. For some families this has meant risking financial devastation. Further, when resources are non-existent, this puts an enormous financial and emotional burden on our families. In the end, there is a tremendous stress on marriages and the entire family, including siblings and grandparents who also feel the impact.

Chapel Haven has been teaching independent living skills to adults with cognitive disabilities and those with autism spectrum disorders since 1972. We have a 35-year history of servicing adults with and without mental retardation toward living independent and meaningful lives. For example, Jeremy is a 20 year old adult with an autism spectrum disorder. Prior to receiving services Jeremy lived at home with his parents. He spent his

days on the computer, isolated in his room using the computer for 16-20 hours per day. During family parties, he would stay in his room. He wanted to socialize and have friends but did not know how. He wanted a job and his own place. The problem was he and his family did not know where to begin or how to accomplish this. In July, Jeremy began services with Chapel Haven. Since receiving services he has successfully completed his first semester at Southern Connecticut State University and has enrolled in three additional classes this term. He has made friends (for the first time) with classmates at Southern and spends his weekends with them. He is now looking for a job with the help from staff. He has learned to use public transportation and is truly on his way to becoming an independent adult.

By experience we know with the proper supports and the appropriate funding there is no doubt that these motivated, intelligent and talented individuals will be able to succeed. Thank you for listening to the testimonies today and I urge you to support this funding which will significantly change the lives of adults with autism spectrum disorders, without mental retardation and for the friends and families who love them.