

Raised Bill No. 5666
An Act Concerning Expansion of the Pilot Program for Persons with Autism
Spectrum Disorders.
March 12, 2008

Good morning, to our legislative officials, committee members, community activists, parents and all others in the room. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Bill No. 5666, an act to expand the pilot program for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

My name is Dee Bonnick and I am a mother of a 17- year- old son who was diagnosed with Pervasive Development Disorder, NOS, a form of Autism at the age of 12. I cannot begin to tell you what an uphill journey it has been for our family. First, to finally get the diagnoses and ultimately getting the help that my son needed. It took us 9 years to get the correct diagnoses and then another 2 years for him to get appropriate services and support. That would put my son at the age of 14. It was at that age, when my son decompensated drastically that finally he could no longer be ignored. Because my son was ill the family became ill. We suffered tremendously. We had very little support from extended family and our community had no viable way of supporting us. With the help of Lois Rosenwald and the CT Autism Resource Center, DCF Regional Office in Meriden, Keith Lombardo, Guidance Counselor for Meriden Public Schools and a lot of collaborative hard work and a ton of prayers, my son finally received some help. In October of 2006, my son was sent to Hillcrest Educational Centers, in Hancock, Massachusetts, where he remains to this day. For the past 2 ½ years, I have advocated for services for our

children throughout the state. No family should have to separate prematurely. As a mother, I would cry every time my son would return to Hillcrest after a home visit. My son has two sisters, one older and one younger who have both suffered from this physical separation. I am sure some our wondering, why did we do this, why did we decide to have our son sent so far away? The answer is simple; we did it to save his life. We did it because he deserves a quality of life that should be afforded to every human being on this planet. We did it because our son and our brother has potential and purpose and he should be giving the chance to use it. We did it because we wanted him to be functional. We did it because as parents, we could not face the grim reality of potentially visiting our son in prison or burying our son because he has a developmental disorder that was left untreated. We did it because we simply, love him so much. Today, our son is doing remarkable well and for the first time in his life, he is starting to feels good about himself. He will be returning back to the State of Connecticut in June. As a mother, human rights advocate and a resident of this state, I ask that you expand and extend the Autism Pilot Program for families in Connecticut. We can no longer ignore what we know is true, that 1 of 155 children are diagnosed across this nation with a Autism Spectrum Disorder and given the appropriate services and support, like my son, they can live a productive life with minimal supports throughout their life times. In closing, I would like to thank my state representative, Cathy Abercrombie for her unwavering support. It has meant so much to me and the Autism community as well. Thank you, for the opportunity for me to share with you my story in hopes for programs and services

to accommodate Autism Spectrum Disorders here in our state of Connecticut.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee Bonnick