



University of Connecticut  
*College of Liberal Arts and Sciences*

Department of Psychology

Dear Members of the Legislature,

I am honored by the opportunity to address you today about the Pilot Project for State-funded Services for Adults with Autism. I am a member of the faculty of the University of Connecticut in Storrs, in the Department of Psychology, and my own expertise is in the area of autism. In the course of my own clinical work and research, I come into contact with many individuals on the spectrum. I am keenly sensitive to the special difficulties faced by high-functioning individuals with autism – people without mental retardation, or what we would call intellectual disabilities. One might imagine that such individuals would, by virtue of their intelligence, be able to function without any special assistance. In fact, I think the case of John may help us to understand why these adults may be in a perilous position. John was a wonderful man with autism, in his mid-twenties, that I worked with several years ago. He left my area to begin a Ph.D. doctoral program at a University in the Midwest, far from his family. A success story, so far; he was fully independent in his living, and had managed to surpass all educational expectations – indeed, he was on a track to becoming a professor someday.

However, John began to founder. He found graduate school far more difficult than his undergraduate work, because it was so much less structured; this is a common experience for adults with autism, to be overwhelmed when they must organize their own work activities. Without his family members to prod him into social activities, he began to feel terribly lonely. His main problem was to be his lack of skills in starting new relationships, both friendships and romances. John misunderstood the intentions of a female fellow-student who was teasing him and believed that she was making a sexual advance, to which he responded; she, however, had intended nothing of the sort, and ended up pressing charges on him for sexual assault. Both this event, and the struggles that John had in his graduate work, are fully preventable events, if someone had been working with John to help him stay on track professionally and personally.

I strongly urge the Legislature to extend the pilot program for state-funded services for adults with autism; services like these could help turn people like John into healthy, functioning members of the community, and contributing taxpayers.

Sincerely,

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