

Public Hearing

Public Health Committee

March 12, 2008

Re: HB 5566

An Act Concerning Expansion of the Pilot Program for Persons With  
Autism Spectrum Disorders

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you today.

I am speaking to request your support for House Bill 5566, An Act Concerning Expansion of the Pilot Program for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

My request is for the passage of this act, and for the funding and services that will be provided for up to 75 additional adults with Autism Spectrum

Disorders (ASD). Funds and services that will help to create and maintain caring and growth opportunities. Opportunities for more full living. Opportunities for a group of adults for whom much of this would not be available with out this measure being enacted.

I'm sure you have or will hear about the need for these services. For training of personnel to provide these services. For the relative lack of funding presently available to this most unique and truly wonderful population. How Connecticut stands apart from almost all of the other states in presently not providing for adults with ASD's.

But I am not very expert in describing those facts. I can relay to you information I have gathered from other sources. But information with which I have little personal or intimate knowledge.

What I do have personal knowledge of is my son Ben.

My name is Marty Hellman. I am 55 years old. I live and practice optometry in Norwich. I am the father of 2 beautiful sons. An 18 year old, Sam, who is a college freshman. And a 22 year old, Ben, who is a member and student at

Vista Vocational and Life Skills Center in Westbrook. Vista offers a training program for adults with neurological disabilities. Ben has Asperger's Syndrome. Ben has to study to learn many of the basic skills of life that the rest of us have been blessed to essentially absorb from our life experiences. Skills relating to fundamental elements of communication. Skills for ordinary forms of socializing with others. Skills on which the every day tasks of buying food, talking to our neighbors or interacting with an employer and co-workers, and simply making and being friends, are totally dependent. And for which in my experience, are far too easy to not only take for granted, but pretty much assume are in place. Automatically.

But this is not the case for Ben. He has to study hard, and practice, and relearn some of the most essential elements of living, just to get by.

And he does this with more grace than I have the capacity to understand.

Ben has taught me that his thoughts and feelings are very much like mine and yours. He wants from his life what we all want. Fulfillment, simple comforts and happiness. He may act and talk in a way that masks and even makes invisible the fact that his humanity is just the same as ours. And

perhaps not despite, but because of his unique challenges, he seems to have a huge, gentle giving heart. One he wants to share.

He wants to work and be a productive member of the larger community in which we all reside. To carry his own weight.

He, his mother, and I are asking you to help provide the opportunities for him to do so.

The truisms are real.

It **does** take a village.

They **are** all our children.

We **are** the keepers of our sisters and brothers.

Treat others as we would have them treat us.

Thank you for your caring, your efforts and your attention.

Respectfully submitted:

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