

March 12, 2008

Madam Chair/ Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary Ann Imundo. I am here today along with my husband, John in support of passing HB5666 - Expansion of the Autism Pilot Program to Hartford County. We are residents of the Town of Berlin and have a 17 year high school senior, Michael who is on the Autistic Spectrum graduating from Berlin High School this June 2008.

Michael is a very intelligent, hard working young man; however, he struggles greatly with the social and environmental issues of daily living. If his day involves unstructured and unpredictable situations, he may easily become very anxious and fail to complete the task he is trying to accomplish. Michael also has difficulty understanding what is implied or inferred. He is rule bound, perseverates and is very rigid. In his mind everything needs to be right and predictable.

Michael's world revolves around his circumscribed interests – Ferraris (all types of cars) and high priced watches. He can tell you fact upon fact about each of them. He feels he needs perfect grades to someday own multiple Ferraris. He has therefore put a great deal of pressure on himself in school, accepting nothing less than an A in each subject. While this sounds like every parent's wish, he has no friendships, no social life outside of school. Nights and weekends are spent at home. Michael feels friends will interfere with study time and his grades will fail, not to mention building friendships is much too difficult for him.

Michael has poor problem solving skills and sees his world as confusing. John and I sometimes fear for his safety and would he know how to handle a sudden change in his day or an emergency? He many times misinterprets environmental cues and facial expressions, emotions, etc. His day is filled with much stress and anxiety.

Michael has been attending a social skills group each Thursday for four years with Dr. James Loomis, PhD through The Center for Children with Special Needs. While Michael is somewhat comfortable communicating in group, he still struggles with social skills outside of the group, school and in daily living. Dr. Loomis feels Michael would someday make a great employee, doing the job to the best of his ability, but with the lack of social/life skills, will he ever be given the opportunity?

Berlin Public Schools, Dr. Loomis, CCMC, Lois Rosenwald/ASRC, John and I (just to name a few) have put a tremendous amount of time into trying to help this young man grow up to be a successful adult. It would be a shame to see all that hard work (especially from Michael) go to waste by having no services beyond high school. John and I feel Michael could become a successful college student, employee and productive adult citizen of Connecticut if he were to receive continued support such as a social and life skills coordinator and a "go to person" at work and school. All parents want their children to be successful adults capable of living on their own. The only way this can happen with our adult children on the spectrum is through the passage of HB5666.

Thank you.

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