

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill no. 5666. 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 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. We know that adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are more than capable of living independent lives, but only if appropriate services are put in

place. The Autism Pilot Program is showing us that these supports make a tremendous difference. For example, Chapel Haven, through the Autism Pilot Program, is providing services to a woman with ASD. This is a woman who wants friends but struggles to make relationships. This is a person who is so overwhelmed with anxiety that she responds to simple situations in a way that results in others feeling negatively about her. A simple "Hello" may leave a negative impression. Because of the Autism Pilot Program she is now receiving the appropriate services and the difference is remarkable. She now (for the first time) has a true friend. They go to movies together, make plans to meet for lunch, go out for ice cream, all without staff support. She is more aware of herself and how her actions/behaviors impact her socially. Recently, she walked by a staff member standing by a copy machine and complimented her on how nice she looked that day. The staff member thanked her, then turned to me and said, "Wow, was that Shelly?!" What major breakthrough for her! Thank you, Autism Pilot Program, for making this difference.

Last year I testified in support for Bill #7280. During that testimony I provided an example of a young man with an autism spectrum disorder. Prior to him receiving services, from Chapel Haven, he 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 2006, he began services with Chapel Haven. As an update, he graduated our two-year program after only

one year. In July 2007 he transitioned into our supported living program where he received a few hours of support a month, for three months, to help with this transition. Since October 2007, without any supports, he has been living in his own apartment, continues to be enrolled in classes at Southern Connecticut State University, has maintained meaningful relationships with classmates at Southern, and is now looking to participate in the best buddies program. He has truly become 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. We also know, given our adult's abilities to learn, that once these services are in place, over time, they will most likely only need minimal services to maintain their independence. Once working, they too will become taxpayers, making this a win-win for all.

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.

