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Before the
 Committee on Education
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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischman and distinguished members of the Education Committee. For the record, I am James Granfield, the Interim Dean of the School of Education at Southern Connecticut State University. I am here to testify on **House Bill 5590**, *An Act Concerning Special Education and Instructional Methods Concerning Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*.

Background

It has been well documented that there has been an increase trend in the identification of children with autism over the past ten years. The table below illustrates this trend in Connecticut. These data parallel data at the national level. A closer inspection of these data reveals that there are trends within these prevalence figures that indicate that identification of children with autism is occurring much earlier, where more than 50% of those children are identified by age 7 (CTSDE, 2005). Likely factors include the opportunity to receive Birth to Three and formal preschool services.

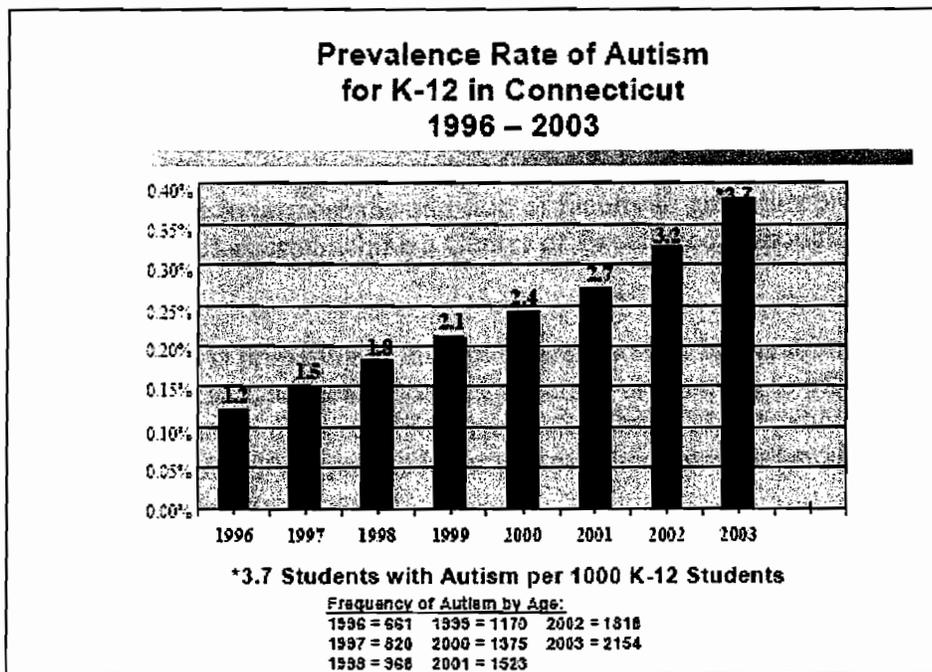


Figure 1. Prevalence rates of autism in the state of Connecticut 1996-2003

Source: Guidelines for the Identification and Education of Children and Youth with Autism. CT State Department of Education, July 2005

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oversight by a certified teacher. Yet, too often, this training is not based on any solid evidence that the paraprofessional is competent to provide such instruction, even under the guidance of a teacher. The Legislative Program and Investigations Committee in a report to the General Assembly (December 2006) outlined specific findings regarding the role of paraprofessionals in our schools. We support efforts to not only encourage districts to provide training, but to *require* this training.

Indeed, the issue of paraprofessionals has legitimately occupied members of the General Assembly for a number of years. Southern Connecticut State University has developed a number of important initiative in this area, including the establishment of a route to early childhood certification for paraprofessional in New Haven Public Schools, a bilingual/ elementary education certification program, and is now in its third year of a 5-year personnel preparation grant to prepare paraprofessionals in four urban school districts to become certified in special education. We have provided previous testimony last year. These and other efforts in our state should be supported throughout the process of planning for and implementing changes to legislation that directly impacts children and youth with autism.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have at this time.

References

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