

RAISED BILL No. 5666: AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF THE PILOT
PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH AUTISM
SPECTRUM DISORDERS.

Testimony of Christopher P. Norris of New Fairfield, CT 06812 in FAVOR of Raised
Bill No. 5666.

Madaam/Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Christopher Norris. I live in New Fairfield and operate a family law practice in Danbury. I am here in support of Raised Bill No. 5666. I stand before you not only as the father of a wonderful 5 year old boy who has been diagnosed with Autism, but as a member of our great state concerned with the difficulties we as a society will face if we do not address the needs of our fellow citizens on the autism spectrum.

WHAT IS AUTISM:

It is critically important that you understand what autism is and how it affects a person. You need to understand that no one knows what causes autism, and no one knows if autism can ever be cured. According to Autism Speaks web site, "Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime... Today, 1 in 150 individuals is diagnosed with autism, making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. It occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups and is four times more likely to strike boys than girls. Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe."

WHY WE NEED TO SUPPORT BILLS SUCH AS RAISED BILL No. 5666

In light of these alarming facts we cannot fail to address the needs of these children when they become adults. Failure to support programs aimed at addressing the needs of these people and their families will lead to a catastrophic situation where we will care for the adult years of these children with or without a plan. If we do not endeavor to create programs such as the one contained in 5666, we will have wasted years of opportunity to find ways of helping these children become productive members of society.

OUR JOURNEY WITH CHRISTOPHER

Up until the year 2005 I had a very limited understanding of what autism was or how such an affliction changes the lives of all who come into contact with someone suffering with Autism.

My son Christopher has a deep desire to escape from our home and yard. He has little to no understanding of the dangers he could face in the streets. If he came across a body of water he would almost instinctively jump in. He doesn't know he will drown if we aren't there to pull him out. He just knows he desires the sensation of water surrounding his body. You see, Christopher has a dulled sense of touch and craves the ability to feel more than he normally can. When he was two he dented the sheetrock banging his head into same. Luckily with physical and occupational therapy his needs became met and the head banging ended.

Our home has become a series of security systems, beeps when a door or window is opened, all locks to the outside require a key even on the inside. Our yard needed to be fenced in to keep Christopher from running away. However just before Christopher's

fourth birthday he learned how to scale a 5 foot fence by simply removing his shoes and walking up the bars. The few minutes it takes him to get over the fence is enough time to keep him safe and get him down. We are constantly spending money to protect him.

Just prior to Christopher's fourth birthday he gained the power of speech. It started as needs based only but he continues a slow improvement. You can't talk to Christopher about his day, but you can see what occurred in his drawings. We are blessed as many autistic children never develop the ability to speak.

We have to be aware of songs that may have a pitch that seems to pierce Christopher's very soul if he hears them. The wrong pitch has at times had Christopher inconsolable for hours.

I pray that Christopher will have the assistance of programs designed to help him blend into our world. I pray for the day that my wife does not cry because she can't live forever to protect her little boy. Please support bill 5666 and help create a future for children like Christopher that is productive instead of a constant drain on state's finances.