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Thomas P. Gaffey, Co-Chair
Andrew M. Fleishmann, Co-Chair
Education Committee
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Raised Bill # 6666 Section 7

Dear Mr. Gaffey and Mr. Fleishmann,

I write in support of Bill # 6666 Section 7. My husband and I have a 10 year old son (Eric) with autism. Eric was diagnosed when he was just three, when we still considered ourselves new parents. Immediately after Eric's diagnosis, we found research that established positive behavioral and educational outcomes for autistic children through a behavior analytic approach to therapy. Encouraged by this research, we embarked on an intensive behavioral intervention program for Eric, which was always under the supervision of a board certified behavior analyst.

I cannot sum up in this letter what seven years of behavioral therapy has done for Eric, but I have no doubt that he would still be in the clutches of the disorder, and the smart, loving, and joyful child that he has become would not exist. The behavior analytic approach to Eric's therapy has not helped Eric alone; it has made us a stronger, healthier family than we would otherwise have been.

Eric's certified behavior analysts contributed to the success of his program in several vital ways. First, they approached Eric's program—that is, his goals and objectives, the manner and pace of instruction, and the ongoing evaluation, in a systematic, consistent way over the entire span of years. They also provided consistent, reliable feedback to us and Eric's therapists and teachers. When there were changes in therapists and school staff, Eric's behavior analysts, through their organized, objective programming and record keeping, provided a common fund from which everyone on his team could draw. It ensured that Eric could, over time, learn in a way in which he was comfortable and familiar. And it gave us confidence to see Eric's success, and sometimes failure, reliably measured. A program based on trial, error and anecdotal evaluations of success and failures simply could never have provided the same positive results.

Second, Eric's board certified behavior analysts have all been exceedingly professional. They all take their jobs seriously, work diligently, and they care deeply for their students. I am a lawyer. I know what it means to be a licensed professional. Certification and licensure undoubtedly instill a sense of responsibility, pride and professionalism that behavior analysts deserve and that improves their work.

I have participated in Eric's behavior analytic program for seven years. I have done everything from teaching Eric to dress himself to creating and delivering parts of his academic curriculum. I have also met and interacted with other kids on the autism spectrum. I have read quite extensively on the subject of behavior analysis. I've attended conferences and workshops. With this background and experience, I know much more than the average parent about behavior analysis for autistic kids. Absent any requirement to the contrary, I suppose I could hold myself out as a "behavior analyst." But this would be a tremendous disservice to any parent who would hire me. As much as I have learned in 7 years, I am no more a behavior analyst than I am a psychologist or physician.

The legislation you are considering will also help school districts. Districts will better serve the special education community in-district when they hire licensed behavior analysts. Licensed behavior analysts will ensure that students are making more progress. Over time these students will be more independent and require fewer special education services.

The other night, before Eric went to bed, I reminded him to brush his teeth. He went into the bathroom and closed the door. A moment later, I opened the door to check on his progress. Aware of my intention, and a little annoyed with me for checking up on him, he asked "Why did you want to make sure?" I replied "because it's my job to make sure." The Education Committee and the legislature have a job, too. You, too, need to "make sure." And this legislation helps "make sure" that the right things are happening behind the doors of our schools. Accordingly, I urge you to vote in favor of Bill #6666, section 7.

Very truly yours,

Carol Johnson