

Testimony  
Submitted to the  
Education Committee

March 23, 2009

HOUSE BILL NO. 6688: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION GRANTS

SENATE BILL 1139: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS  
AND THE ELIMINATION OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANTS FOR COOPERATIVE  
REGIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES

**Re: Opposition to Proposed Bill SB 1139**

Dear Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity Mr. Chairman and members of the education committee. My name is Mark Lambert, I live in Barkhamsted, Connecticut and I am the father of a severely autistic 15 year old son that is a student at the River Street School in Windsor, Connecticut.

By age 7½, my son was miserable in the local school. His behaviors required that he be isolated, learning was at a standstill and the staff was growing fearful of him. Together with the local special education director, we placed Eric in the Locust Street (now Coltsville) School.

Improvement in my son's behaviors began almost immediately. Experts at dealing with autistic children, the Locust Street staff immediately began programs that stopped his aggressive and antisocial behaviors and expanded Eric's skills. His speech showed improvement and his ability to accept change, to wait his turn as well as a number of fundamental academic skills also improved.

Eric's progress continued and at 12 he moved to the River Street School. His progress continues. His skills include making his bed, setting the table and cleaning up, vacuuming, making salads, and playing board games.

Eric is still severely autistic, we believe it unlikely that he will ever be fully independent; however his independent living skills are in place.

Without the intervention of these CREC programs, we believe that we would not have been able to keep him in our home at 15. The costs of institutionalizing him would far out pace what has been spent on the programs in which he has participated.

**The complexity of this disability and the need for powerful, coordinated resources cannot be understated.**

### **Points**

**The needs of a severely autistic child are simply too complex to be addressed by the limited staff and lack of specialized talent at a small school geared for typical children.** A specialized school allows Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapists, Behavior Analysts and special education teachers to all coordinate an effective educational plan. A special school provides the specialized training for paraprofessionals to be effective with this student population. About two years ago, my son developed a wild flapping arm movement. It was unpredictable and potentially injurious to anyone that happened to be near him. It effectively made it impossible to take him out into the community. Together with a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, the special education teacher and the occupational therapist an intervention was agreed upon. All parties working with Eric followed the intervention and within a week the behavior was reduced, within a month it was gone.

**Please don't underestimate the role that the building plays.** Many parents first contact with the River Street Autism Program is parent training held at the River Street School. The building itself plays a roll in teaching skills. For example, the gymnasium (unavailable at the Locust Street facility) has made it possible for Eric to learn to play basketball and volleyball, rollerblade and ride a bicycle. The Adaptive Living Skills rooms allow the teaching of loading and unloading a dishwasher, making sandwiches and other snacks, making beds, and folding clothes. The vocational building allows the teaching of basis skills needed for this population to be employable in the future. Most important, it allows a place for powerful resources in the field of autism to confabulate.

The CREC Programs at Coltsville and River Street have had a profoundly positive impact on my son. My wife and I firmly believe **without these CREC Schools, our son would have been institutionalized by now at a much greater cost.**

### **Conclusion**

Programs like Coltsville and River Street School are the **only effective options** for a highly impacted population. **These programs work.** They can demonstrate that and they are examples of what we are doing well. **Long term cost will be much greater without the skills that these programs can provide.** These programs are great examples of what works, why we would want to constrict them? Connecticut should take pride in these programs. We urge you to vote no on SB 1139.

Sincerely,

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