

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee
March 23, 2009

SENATE BILL NO. 1139 AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION
PROJECTS AND THE ELIMINATION OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANTS FOR
COOPERATIVE REGIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES).

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is Grace Simpson. I live in the town of Windsor. My 5 year old son, Cash'an, diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, was outplaced from Windsor Public Schools and has been attending CREC River Street at Coltsville in Hartford for 2 and a half years.

Prior to Coltsville, when I'd visit my son's public school classroom, I would often find him sitting by himself or sprawled out on the floor while other children were doing arts and crafts, in a gym class, or other activity. With a few exceptions, most of his therapists had limited training on how to work with him. Cash'an was soon completely isolated from peers to receive specialized programming.

In the last 18 months at Coltsville, I've seen promising improvement in many areas including, toileting, following directions, developing pre-school skills, independent skills, such as dressing, and improved socialization with peers. At Coltsville, my son not only has a team – including a full time behavior analyst (many districts consult with a BA part time)- who are highly trained in meeting the individual child where they are to help them overcome challenges that vary from mild to extreme on a day to day basis. At Coltsville, my son, who is still significantly delayed in some areas, can participate in art with typically developing peers or in a gym class, because the program and facility are set up to accommodate his needs.

The rise in autism is an epidemic situation. If my son is to have even half a chance to learn, quality of life or contribute in a meaningful way to society, he needs an environment that will not only embrace him, but have the training and physical assets needed to meet his needs. Too many children with autism are languishing in school systems not equipped to deal with them. If these school construction grants are eliminated, schools like Coltsville – needed to offset the acute inequities in public school services, will be overburdened, compromising services to these children – and requiring towns to invest even more later.

Thank you.