

**Friis, John**

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**From:** Lori Graham [lorigr@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 22, 2009 9:25 PM  
**To:** Friis, John  
**Subject:** Testimony

March 23, 2009

Education Committee

Room 3100, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

Attention: Sen. Thomas P. Gaffey and Rep. Andrew M. Fleischmann

Re: Raised S.B. No. 1142, Session Year 2009

Dear Sen. Gaffey, Rep. Fleischmann, and the Education Committee members,

**Please accept this letter as testimony for my opposition to S.B. No. 1142:**

**New suspension regulations must not be delayed:**

For students with disabilities, most suspensions are the result of schools not having appropriate positive behavioral support plans in place. The message sent to the suspended child is confusing. "Suspend me, so what, I'll stay at home and play video games all day." Parents of special ed children have a layer of stress other parents don't. Parents or siblings need to stay at home with more profoundly affected special ed kids. The reality is that often these behaviors are a result of inadequate planning, and the student with a disability does not have meaningful access to the general education curriculum. Keeping the student in school is best educational practice and should not be delayed for 2 years.

3/23/2009

**Burden of Proof must not be changed:**

My child was one of those children whose inappropriate education caused a display of inappropriate behavior. He was suspended in 7th grade and the next day, the board of ed, realizing the gravity and extensiveness of his social/emotional/academic needs placed him out of district. I cannot imagine providing evidence for such a decision given I am not in the school observing the services and behavior of my child in school. Were the burden of proof to change, there would be an extraordinary imbalance of power. The teachers and administrators are witness to the behavior of the children, and therefore, the burden of proof should remain as it is. As parents have no windows into the school day of their special ed child, and since their child might have a less than a substantive report of what is happening, it would place inordinate strain and stress on a family to prove the obvious. In addition, the down-time of a special ed child as experienced with my 18 year old special ed child between successive ineffective programs set up by the board of ed only serve to increase video game time, sleepiness, and family stress.

**Special education services must not terminate upon the child's twenty-first birthday:**

Ending on the 21st birthday would fully destroy the continuity of a year that runs from Sept to June. It would wreak havoc in the child's life, let alone add a layer of chaos to the exceptional programs with extraordinary needs for continuity.

My child has neuro-biological issues and has just had seizure surgery just after his 18th birthday. With the cessation of seizures, his future is bright. He no longer has memory lapses. We are dealing with the raw reality of serious learning disabilities. To cut short his services could undo all the good done so far. Nothing has gone smoothly with regard to any of our dealings with the Board of Ed and his placements. We need to make up for lost time, not lose more time.

To not service my son would be a waste of a life. There are wonderful transitional programs, far too expensive for the average parent to afford. Children like my son need strong comprehensive programs that run the gamut from academic, vocational, social-emotional, and ADL training.

There are many severely affected learning disabled adults who also carry the additional burden of mental illness who are very accomplished members of society who have made a substantial contribution to the world. Behind the veils of executive function deficits, dyslexia, Aspergers, autism, and bipolar disorder are brilliant brains just wired differently.

I took my son to visit the Berkshire Program in Lee Massachusetts only to find out that the owner/director program was himself dyslexic and Aspergers. The owner of Gersh Academy is

ADD/ADHD, dyslexic, and bipolar, yet he has developed an all encompassing program for autistic kids, K through college. The owner of Hoffman Education (offering tutoring to special-ed kids) right here in Stamford tells the story of his parents being told by the neuropsychologist in first grade that their son would sadly never amount to anything. He is ADD/ADHD, dyslexic, and has severe executive function issues, yet mastered himself, went to college, and now is doing graduate work while running his very successful entrepreneurship.

There is a huge travesty with regard to ensuring appropriate services are provided to these kids with special needs. The wealthy parents just send their kids to the best programs. The educated parent who could not afford these programs, advocate for their kids. The huge travesty is the huge number of kids whose parents have not the education/awareness or financial ability to pay for these services, and these kids lose the opportunities other more fortunate kids' parents make sure their children get.

I know for sure that my child alone is many years behind the "eight ball." Were he not to get the services he is so entitled to, I am concerned that he would end up being a burden on the State, a receiver of SSI, and an unproductive member of society without a focus in life to make him feel good about himself.

I am an Occupational Therapist and often work with mentally ill adults who are really intelligent and could be productive members of society. They get caught in the huge crack between 21 and 65 years of age in terms of service eligibility. Countless are the patients I have treated that were once in the school system and aged out prior to their 21st year. We are a civilized country and do a huge disservice to the special ed community of kids by not placing them in the post high school programs that will develop their skills and promote their independence, and keep their charge in the hands of capable skilled professionals who can help transition them to safe/alternative living set-ups, college, trade school, vocational school...whatever is needed, for as long as possible.

In closing, I am relying on your conscience and strongly urge you to not change the current suspension regulations and to not end special education services on a child's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Respectfully yours,  
Lori Graham

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