

Testimony of Walter L. Glomb, Jr.
to the Joint Committee on Education
March 1, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Walter Glomb. I am a resident of Ellington, Connecticut, and a parent of a student who recently graduated from 18 years of special education in Connecticut. I am also the president of the Connecticut Coalition for Inclusive Education.

I am here to today to speak in favor of Raised Bill No. 5318, AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS.

In a study of Hartford-area school districts, the ACLU found that students with disabilities were suspended at more than twice the rate among regular education students and special education students received out-of-school suspensions at a higher rate than general education students.

In another study of New Haven Public Schools, the ACLU found that the schools routinely failed to identify disabilities in students and, as a result, students with disabilities were regularly subjected to overly harsh disciplinary measures. Court-ordered evaluations during the criminal process later revealed that those students should easily have qualified for special education services on the basis of a learning disability.

In a report by the University of Connecticut on The Relationship between the Juvenile Justice System and Public Schools in Serving Children with Disabilities, the University found that juvenile probation officers feel that schools over-rely on the justice system for discipline.

To these reports, I could add experiences related to me by other parents. For example, a student who has Down syndrome was arrested and charged with assault after bumping another student in the lunch line. This is the face of the problem: young students with Down syndrome being hauled in front of judges.

Prosecutors don't like these cases. Judges don't like to see these cases. Probation officers don't like these cases.

Special education regulations require that behavior related to the student's disability be addressed in the student's Individualized Education Program and that a manifestation determination hearing must be held before disciplinary action is taken. Unfortunately, the manifestation determination hearings in many schools districts are a farce.

The State Education Resource Center, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Autism Society of Connecticut and the Connecticut Down Syndrome Congress (to name a few) all offer training programs for teachers and staff in positive behavior supports. Today there is no reason for any teacher, staff or school resource office to be unfamiliar with positive behavior supports.

School resource officers must be trained in special education laws and they must be prepared to just say NO when school administrators ask them to arrest a student whose behavior is the consequence of their disability. If such training is not practical, then we must remove the resource officers from the schools.

As things are, the civil rights of students with disabilities are being routinely violated in their arrests by school resource officers and we cannot allow this to continue.

Please give a favorable report to the bill. Thank you.