

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 15, 2012
Julie Farthing

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

Please accept my testimony addressing the DMHAS and DPH Budget hearing on February 15, 2013. My name is Julia Farthing and I am a resident of Prospect, Connecticut. I have a twelve year old son who has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder ("ASD"). I have benefited from support services through the Department of Developmental Services ("DDS") and the Department of Family and Children ("DCF") Voluntary Services. Allpointe Services, an agency funded by DDS and DCF, has been a very effective and appreciated resource.

I have also been communicating with Catherine Hogan of Inclusion Teaming. Inclusion Teaming provides social skills development through interaction with neurotypical peers. Catherine and I share many of the same concerns about our children on the spectrum and the scarce resources and opportunities available to them as they transition into adults. This is why I believe Catherine's program (Inclusion Teaming) is an important piece of the puzzle. Our kids need more practice with social communication building to prepare them for more meaningful futures. Catherine's program allows those with ASD to interact with open minded neurotypical students. This allows for an exchange of understanding to enrich future generations the way mainstreaming our kids in school has in the recent past.

I have also had the opportunity to observe other adult resource agencies that provide job coach services. In my experience working in the labor law field, I worry that the agencies providing job support services are too limited. These support staff resources should be made available to all persons with ASD who are transitioning out of school and into the adult world. Many of the ASD community have exceptional skills that cannot be successfully utilized without identifying and accommodating their limitations.

Also, without creating a disincentive to higher citizens with ASD, educating and obligating employers to understand and more individually accommodate. Most employers do not understand how to accommodate a person with a mental disability. For example, I have heard of large companies boasting about hiring disabled employees. While it's wonderful that they are employing the disabled, they do not accommodate them individually. In this example, all the disabled employees were held to the same mandatory overtime policies as the non disabled. As you are aware, many of our citizens with ASD cannot handle the inconsistent schedule of unexpected overtime. This demonstrates a lack of understanding on the employer's part. The support staff could be a great resource to help the employer engage in meaningful discussions in order to accommodate the individual (much like an IEP in school).

In closing, I support Allpointe Services and Inclusion Teaming as important resources that should be made available to our ASD community. I also feel funding for more job support staff, who are better educated and trained on the sensitive issues faced by our transitioning ASD citizens, as well as a collaboration between ASD trained professionals and employment law professionals to create more defined guidelines on how to accommodate the ASD community in the workplace. Thank you for your consideration on these issues.

Sincerely,

Julia Farthing
Parent