

Testimony of Chris Coccozza, Bethlehem, CT 06751

I am submitting this testimony to urge your support for our proposal to amend Senate Bill 129, which is currently before your committee, with language to reopen the Southbury Training School ("STS") to new admissions.

We believe that STS is a crucial part of Connecticut's system of care for the intellectually and developmentally disabled, and that reopening the doors at STS will both revitalize the facility and benefit many more people in the surrounding community.

STS is a state-run Intermediate Care Facility that meets strict federal standards. In addition to providing comprehensive services to the people who live there, STS provides dental and other services to more than 500 community-based clients of the Department of Developmental Services.

Most of the residents of STS are severely disabled, suffering from intellectual, physical, and medical disabilities. STS offers an array of services that are crucial to the well-being of this population. They include 24/7 on-site medical staff, a health care unit that enables individuals to receive care that would otherwise be available only in a hospital or nursing home, staff psychiatrists who are familiar with the history of each resident, an experienced staff with minimal turnover and a dental clinic.

Due to both a court order, which is no longer in effect, and a bill passed by the Connecticut Legislature without the input of STS families or guardians, new admissions to STS have been blocked since 1986. As a result, the fixed costs of operating STS have been spread since the 1980s over a steadily shrinking base of residents, and the cost of care per resident has steadily risen. This has periodically fueled an argument from opponents of the facility that it should be closed.

We believe that allowing new admissions to STS would accomplish the following:

- New admissions would result in a lowered cost of care per resident at the facility and help make it financially viable.
- New admissions would shorten or possibly eliminate a growing waiting list for residential care and services for intellectually disabled people throughout the state.
- New admissions would allow STS to continue and possibly expand its role as a resource for dental and medical care for community-based clients of DDS.

-- New admissions would revitalize the economic stability of our community and surrounding areas

I am writing on behalf of my wifes' aunt Mary Petruzzi, for which she is guardian. STS is an invaluable asset to the state of Connecticut, our region and our community.

Especially in the aftermath of what happened recently in the next town of Newtown, we must consider expanding services and support for those in need or who have, "Fallen through the cracks". Instead of looking the other way, or reducing the balance sheet, we need to realize the risks we take when not addressing or having adequate provisions for our families and communities when dealing with IDD's and mental illness. In many cases, the individuals at STS were of dual diagnosis. We need choices and options.

With a minimal infusion of capital, STS could deliver an incredible bang for your buck with the doors open!

Again, thank you for your time and consideration of this issue,

Chris Coccozza