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Public Health-Senate Bill 360

Distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

I want to thank you for raising Senate Bill #360. The most precious gift that we have is a child. We all want our children to be healthy and happy. Pediatric Autoimmune Neuro-psychiatric Disorder associated with Streptococcus takes that away. Imagine sitting in your kitchen waiting for your child to come down for breakfast like they did every day for years. Today is different. You go upstairs to their room and see your child exhibiting odd behavior. You try to have a conversation and they are defiant, you drag them off to school and they don't want to get out of the car. As you are discussing your child's behavior with them you may notice that they may have developed a tick or twitching, unknown to them. Things just don't seem right. Off to the pediatrician, your child is coming off an infection of Strep and your doctor can't quite confirm what the new issue is with your child.

Suggestions are made that your child may have a disorder on the autism spectrum. Now you go through the motions of further testing, prescription psychotropic drugs, meeting with school officials as you have witnessed a dramatic decrease in certain learning abilities and start talking about an Individualized Education Plan, or Special Education. The whole household has been turned upside down because of this child. But remember, as parents, we will go to the ends of the earth for our children.

We have met with a variety of healthcare professionals because we want to assist our child and find out what is wrong. There are plenty of unanswered questions. How is it that one day they are fine and the next day they are having all these difficulties? We can't find an answer that we believe to be accurate. Because of technology, the world is at our fingertips. We go to the world wide web. We find information on Pediatric Autoimmune Neuro-psychiatric disorder associated with Streptococcus or PANDAS. A warming feeling starts to be felt throughout your body as you read the material. They are describing your child.

Often times, people who suffer from mental health issues can manage this illness with medication. PANDAS is a viral infection, this infection can often be cured if caught and treated early enough.

PANDAS is thought to be caused by antibodies that the body produces to fight off strep or other infections and those antibodies get misdirected from the infection to a small part of the brain, hence the sudden onset.

My niece suffers with PANDAS and if it weren't for the courage and tenacity of my sister-in-law to find information on PANDAS and begin treatment of her daughter, who knows where she would be today. Over the holidays I asked my sister-in-law what steps could we, as policy makers of the state of Connecticut, take regarding PANDAS. Her suggestion was to establish an outreach and education program for healthcare providers that have constant contact with children.

After I introduced the bill, I received a copy of the executive summary of the comprehensive analysis research on the diagnosis and treatment for PANDAS and PANS and the very first recommendation in their report is:

Development of clinical awareness programs for physicians and public awareness programs for educators and community.

I look forward to working with the committee to increase awareness and understanding of this complex challenge facing families throughout our state and nation. Families should not have to suffer through uncertainty when there are resources to help understand and treat PANDAS and PANS, and this legislation would make our state a national leader when it comes to health awareness and care.

Very truly yours,

Kevin Witkos
State Senator – 8th District