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To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you today because I am very concerned about the current and future life of my son and all children who are like my son. My son has an autism spectrum disorder, (he has aspergers and I would like it clarified that you will continue to recognize aspergers as part of the high functioning part of autism spectrum disorder.)

My son has just transitioned from a small special education school to a large mainstream high school. We could no longer afford to keep him at his small school having sold our home and done everything we could thus far to support him. He was very badly bullied at a previous public school in New York and his teachers neglected to protect him from this. After this he had PTSD, (post traumatic stress disorder from being bullied) and was homeschooled for a couple of years. I was also bullied by the special education team and the school personnel as they were prejudiced and ignorant about my son's needs.

I found a small supportive school in Norwalk, CT and we moved from New York to CT three years ago. He made a wonderful transition into this new school which had many of the supports that he needed. He had supportive teachers, classes tailored to both his giftedness and his weaknesses. He had friends. Parents expend huge amounts of time and money to help children like mine. For me I was unable to work as I advocated for my son, taught him, researched schools for him, brought him for testing and all the many therapies. The constant stream of therapists in our child s lives means we have a long day between either homeschooling, driving our children to schools far from where we live, driving to therapists and driving to see our son's one friend that may live 40 miles from our home.

He is now in mainstream high school and while he is a strong academic student he has no friends. There is no adequate system in place at his school to develop peer mentoring or develop friendships for people on the spectrum. Teachers are overwhelmed and everyone is too busy to notice a child with no friends. The first day of school a child committed suicide that evening because of losing the support of his older sister, bullies and having no friends. School is not just about academics and sports but is a very important learning environment for our social emotional selves. We all know that being successful socially and having social skills is a key factor in being successful in life. Children with aspergers have a social communication disorder whereby social skills and everything surrounding interacting with people is very challenging among many other challenges.

My son needs sports that our run by coaches who understand his unique challenges. He needs trained teachers who understand his unique challenges, consultants who can train teachers as needed and for teachers to turn to for guidance. He needs friends and a school environment that cares enough that he has great difficulty making friends and recognizes that he needs supports in place to develop friendships. He needs an environment for learning that understands his unique sensory integrative disorder challenges that all kids on the spectrum have. He could benefit from specialized help in figuring out how to transition to college. There are many layers of specialized help and support that kids on the spectrum need.

My son is at risk for social isolation and for depression. You must grow and develop supports in schools and the community that help these children to reach their potential and to maintain good self esteem. They are vulnerable but often gentle sensitive very intelligent deep thinkers with much to offer society. My son is like a wise shaman at times seeing the world through the eyes of a much older soul with great insight and potential to make a difference.

I hope you will keep developing bills and support for these children. Thank you for taking the time to read this,

Anne-Marie Byrne