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My name is Carol Marcantonio and I am in favor of expanding services for those affected with autism. I speak to you from two points of views; the first being a parent of a child with high functioning autism and the second as a certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA/L). This unique perspective has helped me in some ways, but it has also shown me that there are not enough skilled services to help children on the autism spectrum or their caretakers.

My son was diagnosed with autism on his fifth birthday, but has had developmental difficulties since he was about a year old. I rushed to get the diagnosis because he was about to be exited from special education services because he was academically on track; the educational system was not concerned that he still had a small developmental lag. Since then, I had to fight just to keep the services I was able to acquire at school. He did receive outpatient occupational therapy services which helped immensely and was discharged because he was able to meet the goals that were made for him.

In the meantime, we experienced behavioral issues mostly at school which eventually led my son to be out placed from his school district to a more restrictive environment. He was lumped with other children that had similar behavioral issues, but, to my knowledge, not with other children on the spectrum. Although the staff at the school was approachable and helpful there were no specialized services at this school for children on the spectrum. My son continued to decline in this environment. Eventually, between a lack of medication management and counseling (because of the massive amounts of paperwork and waiting lists for these services that don't even specialize in treatment of persons on the autism spectrum), puberty, and some environmental changes, my son went into crisis and ended up in a psychiatric hospital 3 times in the last 6 months.

Between hospitalizations my son visited the ER in restraints, went to a PHP program that discharged him after one visit because they were not able to help him, and worked with IICAPS who also discharged him after the third hospitalization because they felt he needed a higher level of care. Currently, my son is at The Children's Center of Hamden and I am not happy with their services. I feel like they are trying to rush my son out the door so that they can profit. They lack the skilled services that would truly help my son reintegrate in the community. All I can so as parent to help him is wait to see if DDS will accept his application; I feel like there isn't

anything more that I can do to help him.

As a COTA/L I see how my son's diagnosis not only affects him, but it also affects our entire family. We cannot go out to eat sometimes, have to cut shopping trips or visits short, have to pack more to keep our son calm, and experience more stress and caregiver burden to start. Many aspects of life that are taken lightly by others are a big deal at our house because we want to make sure our son is taken care of. The lack of occupational performance within our family is also carried over to instrumental activities of daily living (work, care of animals and housework for example) and leisure.

Currently, occupational therapy is not included to help us transition our son back home and to help us be able to live our lives better. Most of this work is being done by social workers who (from my experience) do not understand how to help families like mine live with autism. Most of the social workers I have dealt with (and this includes DCF) were a menace and had little to nothing to offer me to help keep my son at home. They also do not have nearly the amount of understanding about autism as I do; I was insulted when a goal was made for me by a social worker to know more about autism and PDD's at The Children's Center of Hamden! IICAPS (a social worker and a mental health counselor) had no idea how they were going to help me help my son take a through shower; I had to think of a goal for them that was close to that, but it was never addressed while their services were in place. Adding occupational therapy as a transition service would not only help address son son's needs when he comes home, it would also help address my needs, which are just important, so that I can give my son the best care possible.

I hope I was able to clarify my frustrations with the system and add a suggestion concerning my personal experience with my son. I am very tired of hearing the same suggestions; most of these did little to nothing to help my son or the family. My son needs people who are experienced with working with children on the autism spectrum. Adding more specialized services in the long run will help both people on the autism spectrum and the government. If people with autism received better services there would be less hospitalizations, less people needing government assistance, and less violence in our community. Healthy people on the autism spectrum can also help our communities in various ways depending on their personal talents. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to know more about my personal experience (I can provide a timeline and give more specifics) or if you would like to know more about occupational therapy. Thank you for your time.

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