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To: The Connecticut State Legislature – Public Health Committee

Re: HB 5558 AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER.

Date: 3/18/14

Vista Vocational & Life Skills Center offers a post-secondary option for individuals on the autism spectrum who need to continue their education, but in a functionally based curriculum...and who need to transition from school to college or work. Like everyone, individuals on the autism spectrum thrive when given the educational opportunities that match their needs, and the long-term support to learn through their experiences.

Vista's training and supports have proven effective in incorporating those with autism into independent living, community life, and work. This successful integration, in turn, provides the exposure and education that allows community members, business owners, employers and neighbors to better understand the value- and pleasure- of including those with autism into the community. Vista is an example of an organization that truly promotes equal access through social change.

Approximately half of the individuals that Vista supports live with an autism spectrum disorder. Of that group, approximately 50% do not qualify for funding through the traditional DDS system, but DO qualify for funding through DDS' autism services division.

However, the funding for these kinds of services for those with autism spectrum disorders who have graduated the mandated school system programs, does not begin to touch the needs of those individuals and their families. Although DDS has established the expectation of funding for those living with ASD, the reality of the funding is so limited as to leave individuals and their families on a prohibitively long waiting list...of years. With no accessible funding on the horizon, individuals with ASD live with their families, with little to no work and few social programs. In essence DDS' autism spectrum services program is established in name only. The low level of funding leaves individuals- and their families- without the ongoing training they need- and clearly benefit from.

It is imperative that the funding to this program- that has proven benefits to individuals, families and the community- be prioritized and increased.

Linda Rogen

Director of Programs and Services

Vista Vocational & Life Skills Center, Inc.