

I am contacting you today because my son, Michael, who will be 20 in April, will only be eligible for special education services through the Fairfield Public School system for another year. It is after that year that we will need to start searching for housing, schooling, employment and social opportunities for him. Though Michael does not have Asperger's Syndrome, he does have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and he is considered high functioning. It is a shame that young adults like him are often unemployed or underemployed. (He is capable of doing much more than bagging groceries or stocking shelves.) He and many of his contemporaries are loyal, committed and trustworthy. The statistics are staggering and deflating – 70% of young adults and adults like my son remain unemployed and under employed. The situation is not improving, in fact – it's getting worse.

Because my son is on the autism spectrum, many community services will brand him as “not competitively employable” simply because he will require an extended time period of support and coaching in the community and on the job. He is in a program now, through the Fairfield Public School system, where he has these supports, but only until he is 21. Those with autism take longer to learn, they need things broken down, and they must rehearse and practice until they get it right. Often, even after they have mastered a concept, they will need a refresher to keep them moving in the right direction. It is not a lot – a reminder, a visit from a job coach, a mentor, or a meeting with the human resources department. It takes so little yet without the support, a life of dependency, isolation and stagnation is the result. It is wrong that these young adults and adults are falling through the cracks – being discriminated against because they do not have a low enough IQ yet they need too much of a long term commitment to be supported while living an independent life. They fall into a vacuum. Michael does not qualify for DDS - and even if he did, apparently there is a 5 year waiting list for services. I have said from the very beginning of our journey through the system, that my son and his peers are the first wave of kids moving up through the system, trailblazers if you will. They need help and support to transition into adulthood and this is just the beginning - there are so many more coming up behind them. When my son was diagnosed, it was 1 out of 10,

Connecticut does not provide services for adults who have Autism Spectrum Disorders without an intellectual disability. My son will be 21 in just about a year and I really have no idea in what we are going to do. I am writing to you about Bill No HB5558 which would expand services for those living with Autism Spectrum Disorders and I urge you to support it. Michael can live and work in the community as a productive member of society but not without the appropriate supports! This bill will allow for Michael to access these supports and live up to his fullest potential.

You can reach me at shangdchld@aol.com.

Thank you again for your time.

Very truly yours,

Shannon Goodchild
72 Whitewood Dr.
Fairfield, CT 06825
(203)332-6208