

Legislative Hearing at LOB Hartford September 23, 2014

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Dear Senators, Representatives, Parents and Friends

Thank you for the opportunity to present my testimony at this Hearing.

We all know that Autism is a spectrum condition. The original "label" included only those with low functioning profound autism. It now also includes the high functioning and those with Asperger's Syndrome. This broad definition is a challenge to absorb for those who are familiar only with the issues of the high functioning end of the spectrum who can even go to college but cannot get jobs. However, it can be simplified by a simple principle that has guided FAP since its founding more than 15 years ago. Namely: Everyone on the Spectrum needs autism services commensurate with his/her needs regardless of the severity of his affliction.

I am here today to speak about the needs of Transition Services of those with classic or profound autism.

Anticipating the time when the school bus stops coming, those with profound autism need life skills and work skills training during their last few years in school. When school is over, most of these kids with classic autism, due to cuts in the State budget, will live at home and the few lucky ones who get into the "system" if they are dual diagnosed and get on the critical list, may get to live in a group home and/or get day programs.

Contrary to common belief these are often just babysitting programs where our kids with classic autism just vegetate in front of televisions or perform "make work" functions such as folding and unfolding rags or assemble and disassemble pens.

The Transition Services have to start in school and funded by the school system and continue after 21 through DDS funded programs by trained, possibly degreed specialists. These Services among others must include:

- OT (Life skills ranging from getting dressed to being able to cross the street)
- Sensory Integration (which is an atypical programs to prepare the brain and body to accept typical teaching)
- Speech/Communication (including augmentative devices, such as iPads if required)
- Assessment of skills and teaching of work skills that can be used in a competitive work environment under the supervision and with the help of job coach companions
- Employment Finding Services which specialize in searching for employment opportunities that match the skills of those with classic autism.

Current group home and day program staff in most cases are untrained in autism and work for low pay with limited skills. My own daughter lives in one of these group homes. We need legislation to require the staff to attend a certain minimum number of training hours to get certification to work in group homes and day programs for those with autism.

Thank you for your attention.

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