

September 24, 2014

Dear Legislators:

My name is Kathryn Strout and I am the mother of Patrick, a 16 year old son with Asperger's Syndrome (a high functioning form of autism). He is currently a Junior at the Intensive Education Academy in West Hartford, CT, a wonderful school for children with autism and intellectual impairments.

Although Patrick is handsome (I know, probably all mothers think that), extremely intelligent and blessed with many wonderful qualities and talents (he has been in many talent shows for his singing voice, and is going to be singing the National Anthem this weekend at the Waterford Speed Bowl), he struggles with emotional regulation, understanding social queues and social norms, and has a slow processing speed that makes it difficult for him to function typically.

I, like many other parents in my position, lose sleep at night wondering how Patrick will be able to utilize his wonderful gifts in a way that will be meaningful to him, enable him to support himself, and enable him to contribute to the community and society. Although Patrick was born with way more potential than I (I am not a genius and cannot sing), when he graduates from school in a few years, he will need support in attending a transition program or college, and support in the form of a job coach, to enable him to gain work experience. His challenges and needs will not end, with the end of high school. Without services to scaffold and support him as an adult, to enable him to reach his full potential, we all, as a community, will miss out on what he has to offer – which is not just a little bit. He is different – not less. He is differently abled – not disabled. He just needs a little help reaching his potential. That help is not readily available by school districts or the State at this time. There is an epidemic of children with autism needing the same kind of services I described above. Currently, families are largely on their own in this fight. Transition services for Patrick and others like him are sorely needed.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Strout