

**Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 1088**  
**AAC Individuals with Developmental Disabilities**  
**March 18, 2015**  
**Submitted by Kathy Wolkner, Member**  
**CT Council on Developmental Disabilities**

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Members of the Committee, my name is Kathleen Wolkner and I live in Farmington. I am here to testify in favor of Raised Bill 1088, An Act Concerning Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disability.

I am a member of the Council on Developmental Disabilities. The Council is s Governor appointed body of 24 members who are parents of children with disabilities, self-advocates who have disabilities, and designated agencies who provide services. Our mission is to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities in their communities. The DD Council voted in November to call on the Governor and the Legislature to close the remaining state-operated institutions in Connecticut for people with intellectual disabilities by the year 2020. We launched our 2020 Campaign in December, and I am pleased that your committee has introduced Raised Bill 1088.

I am the proud mother of five children. Two of my children (twins) were diagnosed at an early age with Autism Spectrum Disorder. At the time of their diagnosis at 19 months, those making the evaluation recommended to me that we start researching institutions and group homes immediately to get on the waiting list, and to have my sons placed there as soon as space became available. We were told that we would never be able to handle them and their significant issues. I was horrified and shocked. I could not fathom that services and treatments would not be available to us that could help us help our sons. Rather than get on a waiting list for an institution, we got on waiting lists for therapies and treatments that we felt would help them their many challenges. After years of struggling with health insurance companies and other issues, these boys, who just turned 14-years-old are in a typical school (and have been since Kindergarten) and are busy with typical kid activities...the school play, soccer team, cross-country team, etc. None of that would have been possible if we had decided to throw in the towel and send them to an institution. They would not have had the loving care of their family 24/7, they would not have gotten the stimulation of being around typical peers, and they certainly would not have developed social skills that enable them to function in the "real world". That is not to say that we did not have help. We had fantastic school districts and support from teachers, therapists and friends.

For people who live in institutions, this is not an option-they lack the choices that could be possible if they lived in a community setting. We owe these people options. They do not deserve to be hidden away from society. They are a part of all of us. We demand

that our school children with disabilities be placed in a “Least Restrictive Environment”. In fact, if these children do not have an LRE, there are repercussions and action would be taken at the state or federal level to remediate that. However, somehow, for those in institutions, that is not the case. Just because someone may need more medical care or may have behavioral issues that would require some assistance, the answer is not locking them away out of sight. Not to mention the staggering cost to the taxpayers of doing so... Rather, these people are able to be a part of the community-any community-and certainly should be a part of a community that they choose. Anything less is a disservice to them and to us.

In closing, although my sons with Autism may require some accommodations as they get older (more time on tests) they will not be relegated to living in an institution. They are members of their community and have friends and goals. They have other options. Shouldn't we all?

Institutions are not the answer. They should not be an option. We, as a society, can do better. We urge your support of Bill 1088.