

I am not originally from Connecticut; however, Hamden has been my home for over six years. My husband and I welcomed our fraternal twin boys in the summer of 2011. Jacob and Lucas are now five years old and are in kindergarten!

Both my children were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in 2014, and after they were re-evaluated last year, Jacob remained on the spectrum and Lucas was given a new diagnosis called Social Communication Disorder. As a result, Lucas attends our zone school (Bear Path School) where he has a 504 plan in place, and Jacob is in a self-contained classroom at West Woods School where he receives special education with 6 other students. My children had previously attended Alice Peck Early Learning Center.

Jacob has been slowly making progress in Hamden Public Schools as a result of the dedicated professionals that support him. These include his special education teachers, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, para professionals and the administrators who do great work.

I support Proposed S.B. No. 542 AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE CONNECTICUT SPECIAL EDUCATION PREDICTABLE COST COOPERATIVE because it will equitably distribute special education aid. Due to limited resources, specifically with staffing, special needs children cannot reach their full potential. Limited staff is expected to do the job of many and are often underpaid, some instructors are not skilled in working with special needs children, which is a disservice to our children. Essentially there is a lack of specialists such as Board Certified Behavior Analysts, who are specifically trained to work with individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Additionally, facilities are limited. Of note, the special education program location for my son Jacob was changed last minute because of inadequate space. I know parents who were given three different program locations over the summer. For reasons unknown, program location kept changing from one Hamden Public School to the next. This is unacceptable, and proves there is a dire need for adequate space to teach our children.

Both my children are very smart boys. Lucas has a fantastic memory and can tell you which teams played in the final games leading up to the super bowl AND the scores of said games. Jacob has been reading since he was 3 years old! Yet he does not have spontaneous language. He was given an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to help him communicate. However, he often gets silly using the device, which leads to unproductive sessions. The staff in his program at West Woods is not equipped to troubleshoot. Thus, we are waiting for the one individual (who is on personal leave) that was contracted from Cheshire to provide suggestions on how to get Jacob to be more productive with the AAC device. Needless to say there is a lot of time wasted just waiting... If staffed with a trained group of professionals needed to help special needs children flourish, ultimately the quality of life of autistic individuals will exceedingly increase. As such, I urge you to create the Connecticut Special Education Predictable Cost Cooperative so that Hamden can get the resources it needs in order for our children to succeed. Thank you.

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