

2/13/19

To Whom It May Concern,

Our names are Jill Caron and Sue Davis and we both have children who are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). We are also the co-chairs of the Foundation for Exceptional Children of Suffield (FECS). FECS is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to create awareness, provide information and support to Suffield residents with special needs. The first initiative of FECS was Project Keep Me Safe. The purpose of Project Keep Me Safe was to educate Suffield's Emergency Personnel on the interaction and response to an emergency situation involving children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to provide information to community members, parents and caregivers on the wandering/elopement risk for children with ASD and strategies to maintain their safety. Project Keep Me Safe has been funded completely by FECS and has trained Emergency Personnel in several towns throughout Connecticut and has also trained paramedics and TSA workers at Bradley International Airport.

We are writing in support of the proposed bill H.B. No 5156 – An Act Concerning First Responder Training for incidents involving Juveniles with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Non Verbal Learning Disorders. When Sue's son was younger he was prone to wonder. He wandered away from every school within the school district he was attending at the time even though he had a 1:1 paraprofessional working with him, he wandered away from family at a beach while vacationing in South Carolina and there were several other situations of elopement.

Any of these situations could have developed into a dangerous, life threatening situation in which the police may have had to be called to intervene and/or turned into a search and rescue mission. Handling a crisis situation with any child is difficult; however, understanding how to intercede and work with a child with ASD is unique and requires special knowledge of how to engage, work and secure a child on the spectrum. Many children with ASD may react to an emergency first responder in a way that seems combative and may run away from the very person who was sent to help them; therefore, it is crucial to teach first responders how to identify someone with autism and how to best help them in an emergency situation. 1 in 59 children will be diagnosed with ASD which impairs their communication, social skills and sometimes their cognition making first responder education more crucial than ever.

We cannot urge you enough to support this bill – there is nothing more important than protecting our children from the inherent dangers that come with their disability and training the responders who may have to act to support families and interact with children on the spectrum in high stressful and at times life threatening situations. We are asking everyone to fully support the enactment of the bill H.B. 5156 -- An Act Concerning First Responder Training for incidents involving Juveniles with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Non Verbal Learning Disorders. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Susan Mercik Davis and Jill Caron

Foundation for Exceptional Children of Suffield

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