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### Testimony in Support of HB 5156

My name is Shanon McCormick and I live in Pawcatuck, CT.

I would like to ask you for support of HB 5156. Some of the characteristics common among those with Autism and Non-verbal Learning Disorder – difficulty quickly processing social cues, poor visual, spatial motor and organizational skills are common also among individuals who live with Down syndrome. As the parent of a 21-year-old son who has Down syndrome, and as the executive director of the Down Syndrome Association of Connecticut, I can speak with authority to the need for this legislation.

Let me share a story with you that every parent of a child who has Down syndrome carries with them daily. In 2013, barely six years ago, a young man with Down syndrome, Ethan Saylor, died at the hands of three off-duty police officers in Fredericksburg, Maryland. The officers misinterpreted Ethan's anxious behavior at a movie theater as intransigence. In an effort to forcefully remove him from his seat, the officers threw Ethan to the ground and handcuffed him, in the process crushing his esophagus. His last words were, "Mommy, help me."

I ask you to sit with that picture in your heart for a moment and consider what it feels like for the parents in my organization every time their children leave the house. Ethan's mother, Patti Saylor, was and continues to be a leader in the Down syndrome community. She had taught Ethan the same lessons about appropriate behavior and communication that I have been teaching my son since he was little. These are the same lessons all caring parents share with their children, but for our kids, because of their slower intellectual processing speed and sometimes impaired abilities to communicate, Ethan Saylor's fate tells us teaching them well may not be enough.

Ethan was experienced in moving about independently and he even had paid support staff with him when he died. The factor that was missing in the AMC theater in Fredericksburg that night appropriate officer training. Had the officers been trained in de-escalation techniques, had they been exposed to individuals with intellectual disabilities, had they been trained in alternative responses to the situation they faced, Ethan might still be alive.

My son, Sean, and many other young adults with Down syndrome in Connecticut are just like Ethan was. As Sean's mother, I can tell you that the line parents of individuals with intellectual disabilities walk between supporting our children's independence and the fear that we are setting them up for tragedy is razor thin. Your vote in support of trained emergency response

professionals will make that walk less harrowing for us, and it may prevent a tragedy like Ethan Saylor's death, here in Connecticut. Please support this legislation.