



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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Public Safety and Security Committee

February 14, 2017

### **Testimony in (Support of/Opposition to) H.B. 5156: An Act Concerning First Responder Training for Incidents Involving Juveniles with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Nonverbal Learning Disorder**

Chairman Verrengia and Bradley; Vice Chairs Osten, Paolillo; Ranking Member Sredzinski, Hwang; and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of **HB 5156**. During the 2017 session, legislators overwhelmingly approved a bill to require training of state and local police officers for incidents involving juveniles with autism spectrum disorder and nonverbal learning disorder. It was signed into law and became Public Act 17-166, effective October 1, 2017.

This proposed bill, HB 5156, expands training to include other first responders, including fire and emergency medical personnel, who may need to respond to incidents, such as wandering, involving affected juveniles.

Training in best methods of communicating with young people on the autism spectrum and those with nonverbal learning disorder promotes not only public safety but also public awareness of variations in sensory processing. Some of these individuals may be non-verbal and may react differently to sirens, flashing lights, sudden movements, loud noises, etc. Variations in perception can also put these individuals at higher risk for wandering, drowning, bullying or abuse. First responders, as respected members of their communities, can also help spread what they have learned through the training process and promote better understanding.

This bill provides that this training be required only at no cost through appropriate qualified institutions, professionals and organizations. An added benefit of this arrangement is that it will offer an opportunity for collaborative relationships among first responders, health care professionals and advocacy groups.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in favor of this bill. I am asking for your support in advancing this worthy effort to offer more of our first responders' information that will assist them in their encounters with these individuals – and foster better understanding from the general public.

Sincerely,

Tami Zawistowski- State Representative-61<sup>st</sup> District