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Credentials: Career firefighter, Fire service instructor, EMT/paramedic, Mom to 5, 4 of whom have some sort of developmental delay/LD, Partner's in Policy/Advocacy Grad., ALEC Training Instructor(Autism and Law Enforcement Coalition)

I support the repeal of section C Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-76q so that CTECS can no longer to use it to justify discriminating against students with disabilities in the admissions process.

I testified last year about this bill, in person but unfortunately I am unable to be present this round so I hope you will consider my written testimony.

My connection with this process is my son, Gavan Prior and his inability to access the CT Tech HS system due to his diagnosis.

I received his diagnosis of ASD when he was just shy of two years old. That began my quest to get him whatever he needed to be successful.

Gavan loves media arts in its many forms....video editing is his specialty. Our State technical High Schools offer this as a field of study so of course I decided to check into the program for my son due to his interest, drive and talent in this area.

Unfortunately, our public, State owned Technical High Schools do not see their facilities as a proper place for a child with Autism/ ID to pick up the knowledge that may propel them into a paying, rewarding career. These

decisions are often made without even taking a peek at an IEP and in our situation, no dialogue between the tech school and my son's High School. In our case the decision was made with a simple, "We don't do that." No amount of "Whys" seemed to garner me any further knowledge in this matter and I was left wondering how my son could be denied a chance to learn career skills in the same environment as other kids due to a disability? I have been forced to find alternative strategies and internship positions that will, hopefully, afford him a similar experience and allow him to learn and progress into a job within his preferred field. Thankfully, with the help of his transition program, opportunities are appearing. Over the last year my son has been granted access to generous internships and classes that allow him to show what he is capable of and he has been extremely

successful not only in his chosen field of study but also in changing people's minds about "that kid". In fact, it has been expressed several times that Gavan displays many important work skills that so many other young adults his age lack. He has also surprised many with his innate talent in the media arts field and his willingness to learn. He still has a much longer road ahead than the typical student.

I can only wonder where he would be now if he had been allowed to learn at our tech schools?

My experience with our Tech High Schools have made me question what we are really talking about when we speak of diversity and inclusion? Entitlements and welfare reform? If we have the means to educate a child in an area of strength, using a free, appropriate, public education, then why? Why wouldn't we grab that opportunity to keep someone out of the system and help give them the gift of

independence? So, I am hoping Gavan's story will cause you to consider these questions and think about what you really want for our kids, our State and what kind of example CT is setting within the world of special education and beyond. How many talents are being wasted due to ignorance and stubborn refusal to open our minds to new evidence surrounding our kiddos who have different abilities? I would like Connecticut to strive to be a leader in inclusive and successful education. Our tech schools could be leaders in this wave rather than another roadblock to navigate.

Thank you for your time and consideration.