

Connecticut General Assembly
Bi-Partisan Task Force on Gun Violence
Prevention and Children's Safety
300 Capitol Avenue, Room 5100
Hartford, CT 06106

February 27, 2013

Greetings:

I am a licensed clinical social worker and I practice at Child and Adult Psychiatric Services in Waterbury, CT. As such I interface regularly with, among others, people with autism spectrum disorders and their families. The purpose of this correspondence is to respectfully bring to your attention what apparently is an ongoing problem of accessibility to services at The Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This issue is particularly salient at this time because DDS is the state agency charged with providing services to children and families with autism spectrum disorders. The department is apparently in a crisis state.

It is important to note that, although this task force by title is focused on gun violence and *mental health issues* per se, autism is not necessarily related to 'mental illness'. Two issues must be considered as this task force works:

- It is unclear if Adam Lanza, the shooter at the Sandy Hook massacre, was mentally ill.
- It is apparently a fact that he was a person with autism, and may have been chronically under served by the system (including DDS and Department of Education / Bureau of Special Education) – state agencies that should have been there for his family and apparently were not in any substantive way.

I suggest the scope of the committee's work take these two important factors into account as it does its work and formulates its recommendations and presents them to the Governor.

Recently two families I serve have experienced great frustration in applying for services from DDS, even to the extent that applications have been lost, calls have gone unreturned, and staff has left the department without replacements being hired to fill critical functions. I understand that there is no reception staff at the DDS regional center in Cheshire; an answering machine is what greets you when you call there. I personally have had very poor service as I have attempted to advocate on behalf of my patients.

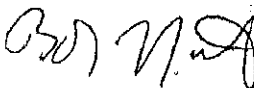
What is happening is that my patients are not able to get services. There have been problems at the department over my career, but I have never seen things as bad as they are at the present time.

This is a critical time in the history of DDS. About 1 in 88 children has been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network. This number is way up from a decade ago. At the present rate, Connecticut is completely unable to provide services to these children who are coming and coming fast.

It is imperative that the task force take the above into consideration as you formulate your recommendations. If the media is any gauge of the focus of this task force's work, it may be that these factors will be missed for the sake of more sensational news bits that lend themselves well to the public's hunger for sound bites. Had the Lanza family been connected to DDS and Educational services that were adequate and effective the tragedy at Sandy Hook might not have occurred.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit these thoughts for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Bob Nield, LCSW