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I would like this submitted for the record:

Almost 12 years ago, I testified before a subcommittee of Connecticut state legislature about the issues in mental health services, especially those affecting children. Today, I would like to refer to and add to that testimony.

On February 23, 2001, I said that I had two children. Michael is currently a teacher in Newtown, Connecticut. He has a Masters' Degree and a beautiful wife and child. Brian has a Master's Degree from Pace University in New York City. I am proud of both of them. In 2001, I posed the question, "*Why am I here?*"

The path each of them traveled for early life success was vastly different. Brian has Asperger's syndrome. In 2001, that term, as well as pervasive developmental disorder, and even autism spectrum disorder, was new to everyone, even those working in the mental health field. There have been many changes in the last 12 years regarding treatment of anyone on the autism spectrum and children with more severe mental health conditions. For one thing, autism is not thought of as a mental illness; but there was so much unknown, that was how Brian was treated. That is part of what gives me the perspective into that system. I do not want to tell you about its manifestations or those of severe mental illness, or even what may happen if left untreated. I would like to tell you Brian's story.

In 2001, I said—*Brian was a bright, intense child who always had social difficulties and he came into crisis about twelve years ago (24 years now). At that time he spent two months in a short term psychiatric hospital where it became obvious to my husband and me that to get him the care and services he needed, we would have to fight many systems. Brian was one of the lucky ones. As parents who were educators, we were part of the educational system and determined that our child would not fall through the cracks. We also had insurance coverage in the era before HMO's and managed care. So we began a long battle. We insisted that we maintain custody of our child, though we were encouraged not to. Even with our diligence and monitoring, in retrospect, we wonder if at time, Brian's civil rights were not compromised.*

Brian went from the short term hospital to 15 months in a long-term psychiatric facility. While he was there, I watched as other young people were discharged because "their insurance ran out." Many were put back on

the streets little healthier than when they entered the hospital. When it was Brian's turn to leave, we were panicked as to the next step. Clearly not ready to jump back into the mainstream, I remember having a conversation with an insurance official. I was told that there was no other service that my insurance would cover, so we would wait and see if Brian went into severe enough crisis again to need full hospitalization; that they would probably cover. I remember telling her, "Not my child."

My husband and I had the financial means to send Brian, at fifteen, to a residential center in Florida. From there it was a private residential school back in Connecticut, from which he graduated high school, and then Life Development Institute in Arizona, one of the few facilities in the country for young adults with learning disabilities. We have personally spent several hundred thousand dollars for Brian's care and education. In some ways, the money was the easy part. Through all these years, we had to educate ourselves and advocate for our child. There was little help, few professionals that I trusted, and systems that moved slowly at best. I was often told to give up.

Fast forward to today. Brian has his Master's Degree in psychology, but his social disability is such that he does best in a job without social interaction. So, I always say, he is the only night watchman in New York City with a Master's Degree. He has kept this job for over 5 years. But as you can imagine, one cannot live independently in New York on minimum wage. So his father and I continue to supplement his income.

In September of 2000, I became the principal of an elementary school in Watertown, Connecticut. I found myself then and now, as a principal in Southington, again *back in the fight for children who need social and psychiatric services, parents who are frustrated, and with their children, in pain. I see a system that is overworked, underfunded, and truly in crisis.* The professionals in both schools and districts where I have been an administrator work hard with parents, special educators and pupil personnel educators who support them. DCF workers listen but often cannot follow-up on a case because there are so many. *These professionals need your help. I urge you, for all our children to use any funds available to help establish a statewide system of care, one with wraparound services that keeps funding in the child's community, to enable all our children to have as normal a childhood as possible.*

I asked this in 2001; I ask it again now. Educators, parents, social workers cannot do it alone. We need legislative support and funding so that those with mental illnesses can be fully treated and become, like both my children, good citizens and worthwhile members of our society.

Respectfully submitted,
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