

Submitted by: Lisa Clark, MSW
House Dist. #47, Senate Dist. #29

Submitted on: February 28, 2021 via email to apptestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee:

I would like to introduce myself; my name is Lisa Clark. Most importantly I am the mother of a 21-year-old son with autism. Today I would like to voice my **OPPOSITION** to HB 6439 to provide level funding for social services.

The Hartford Courant article published on January 29, 2021 titled, “Co-chairs of General Assembly Appropriations Committee propose multi-year, \$461 million increase in aid for nonprofit social services” is a step in the right direction and one I **SUPPORT**.

There are currently two legislative bills pending that aim to fully fund the Autism Waiver. They are **HB #5469** *An Act Expanding Autism Spectrum Disorder Services Under the Medicaid Program* and **HB #5671** *An Act Expanding Medical Assistance for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. My self and may other parents of young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder are quickly coming to the realization that there are zero supports beyond age 21 and even earlier for some. In our case, when I approached the school district to obtain an IEP for my son to help with the transition process, I was misled. The principal informed me during our PPT meeting that converting my son’s 504 plan to an IEP was a waste of time because institutions of higher education would not accept an IEP. Upon hearing this answer, my son’s psychologist suggested we hire an attorney, we were unable to afford the \$5,000 retainer fee required so we never obtained an IEP.

Now at the age of 21, my once bright son who aspired to attend Yale University with an IQ of 128, sits isolated in his bedroom. A Yale Child Study Center evaluation completed in October 2019 indicates his communication skills, daily living skills and socialization skills place him in the age equivalency range from a low 4.2 years old for interpersonal relationships, to a high of 15.3 years for community daily living skills. Research shows the importance of early intervention and a plateauing of executive functioning skills by mid-20’s.

My son and many others like him in Connecticut diagnosed with autism with IQ’s over 70 are languishing in their family homes across the state. They are fully capable of being productive independent members of society with some support, but they need that support now! Waiting is not an option. If we do not capitalize on the limited time their brains are still malleable, they will become an even greater financial burden to our state. Aging parents will become unable to care for them and seek placement in institutionalized settings costing all of us significantly more.

In closing, the current pandemic has made matters worse for this vulnerable population already plagued by several comorbidities including severe anxiety and depression. I know because I experienced this firsthand this winter when my son was hospitalized with suicidal ideation. Placement was difficult to find. Transitional partial hospital programs for young adults were full

resulting in our son being placed in a partial hospital program with adults in their 70's! Please do not ask our young adults to wait any longer for services, time is running out! Please **SUPPORT** an increase in social service funding before our young adults are sentenced to a life in their bedrooms permanently. Thank you for you for taking the time to read and hear all of the testimony that will be shared by others on this topic.

Sincerely,

/s/

Lisa Clark, MSW

cc: Catherine Osten
Toni Walker
Irene Haines
Jason Rojas
Mike D'Agostino
Doug Dubitsky
Mae Flexer