

Submitted by: Kathryn Strout, Ledyard, Connecticut

Submitted on: March 2, 2021 via email to: apptestimony@cga.ct.gov

I SUPPORT 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

I OPPOSE Governor Lamont's proposal to provide level funding for social services.

Dear Appropriations Committee:

My name is Kathryn Strout and I'm mom to Patrick, a 23 year old amazing young adult diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome/Autism at age 3.

Patrick's development and education has been challenging and that is putting it beyond mildly. He was out-placed by our school district at the end of 8th grade and was placed in several different therapeutic schools before he graduated from the Gengras Center in West Hartford in 2019 at the age of 21. Although Patrick has come so far with amazing schools and professionals, the challenges that existed for us to need a therapeutic school did not go away at age 21 but the funding did, as it does for all young adults in Connecticut with an IQ over 70, regardless of their level of functioning.

Patrick is very intelligent, a talented singer, very close to being bilingual in Spanish, is taking college classes with mentors through College Steps at Connecticut College (private pay), motivated and very social but still struggles with anxiety, feelings of inferiority, and needs help learning new skills and feeling confident in his skills and abilities. He needs help with activities of daily living that will allow him to live and work independently and will need a job coach longer than the 3 to 5 hours that BRS currently gives this population of young adults and he has the earning potential to be a contributing member of society but he and thousands of others throughout the state are not meeting their potential; they are home with their families getting no help from the state because their IQ's are over 70, although they lack the independence skills necessary to function typically in society.

There are currently organizations functioning in Connecticut who would greatly benefit this population of young adults, but the out-of-pocket costs are prohibitive for most families and they are not able to take advantage of them. These organizations are funded by Medicaid in other states but not Connecticut. LifeNet, (by AANE in Massachusetts) is a program that would put a life altering professional team around these young adults to enable them to learn how to live and work independently, and the other is College Steps, which enables young adults interested in pursuing a college career to navigate campuses socially and integrating them in college life easing their anxieties and enabling their capabilities so they can obtain the education they would need to obtain meaningful employment. These organizations find it extremely difficult to navigate the red tape in Connecticut (not found in neighboring states), needed to allow

Medicaid to help fund these programs for the people who need them, and our children are the losers from this red tape. These organizations have the ability and potential to greatly benefit and enhance the lives of this population of young adults.

There is also a largely unfunded autism Medicaid Waiver in Connecticut that would greatly benefit Patrick and others like him. The list is more than 1700 people long, showing in and of itself the need for these services. The time is now to either fund this waiver in a way that moves these very deserving young adults further through pilot programs, or revamp the system to include them under DDS outright, changing the criteria.

I wanted to introduce myself in this budget year but realized that our work is ahead of us to the 2022 budget year, but I am still hopeful that you can see the dire need for change for this population this year and you make meaningful changes that can bring hope and direction in this budget year. We will be rallying together as a very large group and we are going to be asking for significant funding for this population of kids who are languishing in their parent's basement right now and deserve a chance just like the population of people that are funded under DDS. Many of the challenges are exactly the same but in many of these cases, the potential is way more obtainable. Families of these young adults need help now.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Strout