



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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Testimony of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
Before the Human Services Committee

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March 13, 2007

Good Afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on **Raised Bill 7280, An Act Concerning Autism**. The bill requires the Department of Social Services to take all necessary action to secure Medicaid funding for home and community-based individualized support services for adults who have autism spectrum disorders. The Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (OPA) supports the bill and urges the Committee to continue its support for people with autism spectrum disorders.

It is not clear whether the dramatic increases in the number of children with autism spectrum disorders are the result of unknown environmental factors or better identification techniques. It is clear, however, that as these individuals are maturing into adulthood, they and their families need a source of comprehensive advice and support. Most of these individuals do not need hugely expensive programs of support. They need assistance transitioning into adult roles and lifestyles including assistance with life planning and coaching on specific strategies they can use to compensate for the effects of the disability on relationships at work and in the community. They need help building networks of support and guidance in solving routine everyday problems. If they get that help, these individuals can go on to lead fulfilling lives as contributing members of their families and communities.

I would like to turn the remaining time over to Patricia Tyler, an Abuse Investigator at OPA and the parent of a child with autism.

My name is Pat Tyler and I am the parent of a young adult with autism, who receives services from a Medicaid Waiver operated by the Department of Mental Retardation. My family is fortunate to have an array of services for my daughter that allow her to live a safe and productive life. Others not eligible for DMR services are not as fortunate. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention now indicates that the prevalence of individuals on the autism spectrum is now projected at 1 in every 150 individuals. Unfortunately, individuals on the autism spectrum who are not considered to have an intellectual disability are not eligible to receive services from the Department of Mental Retardation. For these individuals, the promise of leading a safe and

productive life is not so bright. These individuals on the autism spectrum are left to fall through the cracks of the service delivery systems.

Consider our family friend, Tim. Tim was an individual who graduated from a four-year college. On paper, he should have been successful. If you met him for a brief period, you might find some of his mannerisms a bit odd, but you might not know that he had great difficulty integrating into community life post his college graduation due to his poor social skills, impulsive behaviors, and depression. Although Tim was a bright young man who could lecture for over an hour about antique cars, he could not successfully hold an interactive conversation with most people. In fact, Tim shared with me that he found eye contact to be a painful experience for him, and he preferred others to keep a certain physical distance from him at all times. Tim, a college graduate, got a job at a grocery store as a bagger, where he would often get into trouble interacting with the customers. For example, there was an occasion when he decided he would not bag the customer's groceries because he was wearing a Red Sox's baseball cap, and he was a Yankee's fan. On another occasion, he inadvertently insulted a co-worker by telling her that her slacks looked tight, so she must have gained some weight. These kinds of comments made developing friendships with Tim difficult. His parents would report that sometimes Tim would become depressed and just take off for a week or so. Sometimes Tim would drive around in his car, at other times he would go to car lots and look at cars. Two winters ago, Tim was having a particularly difficult time. He had lost his job bagging groceries, and although he had gone on several job interviews, nothing ever materialized for him in terms of getting a job. Tim just wasn't a great interviewee. He spent too much time talking about cars and not enough time inquiring about the job he was applying for. So, without much success occurring in his life and a family that had become exasperated in their attempts to help Tim be successful, Tim took one of his weeks off and disappeared. One week later, the police over the state line discovered Tim in the back seat of a car sitting on a car lot, frozen to death.

Tim's story represents many individuals in our state who can benefit from the waiver funding contemplated today that will create opportunities for hope and success. Funding that can offer a way for people like Tim to prosper. These are supports and services currently available in Connecticut but not accessible to those described in this bill who need them. I strongly urge the committee to consider this legislation on behalf of our citizens with autism. Thank you.

I urge you to support Raised Bill 7280.