

To: Senate Education Committee

From: Chris Lloyd, representing myself and Texas Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

Re: SB 1000, relating to the accessibility of services for certain students with autism or autism spectrum disorder

Date: March 27, 2007

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Chris Lloyd and I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak before your committee today on an issue of great significance to my family.

My son Thomas has Autism. Thomas was diagnosed with PDD Asperger's fall of 1997 upon entering Kindergarten. Thomas has brought great struggle, joy, and humor to our lives. He has come along way from the kid who started school carrying imaginary picket signs saying "I want to go home" (The Fall of 1997 was the UPS Strike; I can only assume this is where Thomas got this concept from) We were fortunate to have a wonderful PPCD Teacher named Donna Worley that worked with him to place the signs at the door when he entered her classroom so as not to disrupt her class or mess up his imaginary signs. She also encouraged me to educate myself and be the best advocate for Thomas I could be.

It has been a daily struggle. The support of a collaborative team and partnership of Campus and District resources and programs such as a one-on-one educational Aide, Speech Services, Occupational Therapy, Behavior specialist, Social Skills groups, an Autism Specialist, and in-home Training support have been essential. With all this support, provided each and every day that Thomas attends school, Thomas has made academic and social progress. That is a whole lot more services than a \$15,000 voucher will cover. We have advocated for my son to assure he gets an education and quality services and support in the public schools. It has been a living nightmare and a joy.

In my efforts to be at the school to know what was going on with Thomas the campus Principal encouraged me to get involved with PTA. I think she was trying to get me involved in something constructive. Through my 10 yrs of PTA service and leadership Training I have learned the importance of advocating for ALL children. I also volunteer in RRISD with our Special Education Advisory Council where we work to empower and support parents to be involved as positive partners in their children's education.

Today I am here as a parent of a child with Autism representing the largest child advocacy organization in the state, Texas PTA and our 630, 000 members. PTA advocates for ALL kids including my special needs son.

I am here to speak against Senate Bill 1000. We need the funding to stay in our public schools to continue to develop, train, and support our teachers and staff with the necessary tools to provide services to ALL students in Texas with Autism. Shifting funds will leave

needed programs with diluted resources in our public schools. A voucher is a voucher, and this voucher will not help ALL the children in Texas with Autism. It will create a bigger disparity for families with limited resources and opportunities; and could cripple existing progressive Autism programs with numbers too large to serve students effectively in an inclusion model.

I appreciate your dedication to our children and ask that you not support this voucher bill disguised as an autism incentive. Please keep the funding and programs in our public schools where they can serve all children.