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Talking Points

My name is Mika Bradford. I am a wife, certified nutritionist and a mother of a 2 sons with different variations of autism.

Thank you Senator Shapiro.

Thank you to the Senators here today.

I've talked to Texas Parent PAC and other education leaders, and we agree that we need better education for children with autism in Texas.

Autism is an epidemic the Texas school system does not have the luxury to any longer ignore.

- 1 in 150 children is now diagnosed with autism
- That number is increasing at a rate of 20% each year
- Meaning every three hours a child is diagnosed with this debilitating disorder

An Innovative Solution. A recent Harvard study estimates that it costs \$3.2 million to care for a child with autism over the course of their lifetime. If we don't appropriate funds now to help these children succeed, we will meet again in the future to deal with the societal consequences of ignoring this epidemic. It is not will we spend the money, it is merely when and at what cost to our society.

Intensive And Effective Education Works. Comprehensive, individualized assessment combined with intensive educational programs can help children with autism become indistinguishable from their peers. Families of children with autism are merely asking for educators who have an understanding and are fluent in how to teach our children.

Protect Our Children. Some people want to turn this into a "voucher" bill. We are not associated with a voucher movement and do not want our children used as pawns in a political fight. It is appalling that the struggles we face as parents of children with autism would be minimized to being a dispute of this nature. We are for something and that is furthering the future and survival of our children!

Promote Regional Centers Of Excellence. In speaking with the Texas Parent PAC and other educators there had been concern for families affected in the rural regions of Texas. I believe that this legislation can help rural school districts in allowing them to collaborate and develop ~~programs~~ that will work in meeting the needs of children with autism in there area.

TEA Approved Non-Public Schools Needed. TEA-approved non-public schools are a crucial link in the education of our children. Adding these centers to the bill will improve the kinds of programs and services available to our children.

We are Pro - Public Schools. Let me reiterate. I wholeheartedly support our public school system. I would love to nothing more than to participate in the American dream of placing my child on a bus to go to public school every morning with the assurance that he will be given the education that he is capable of receiving. This does not happen. He needs special attention that his public school just can't offer.

Some Texas public schools have the will and the knowledge to provide for autistic children. Others do not. For children in school districts that do not, we face the choice of either leaving our child in public schools to face a lifetime of affliction and possibly institutionalization, or seek alternative arrangements at significant personal expense.

It is the dream of any parent of a child with autism to see their child return to a public school setting with their peers.

I appreciate and thank Texas Parent PAC for their input. They have given us suggestions, including the need to return kids to public schools and promote regional centers of excellence. We couldn't agree more.

I urge you to hear my plea to address a crisis in my family, in our schools and in our state and pass SB 1000 (ASAP) with the adjustments I've discussed here today.

Thank you.

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