

January 5, 2016

ND State Legislation Community  
Bismarck, ND

To whom it may concern:

I would like to voice my concerns with lack of services within our communities for youth with special needs.

I'm a single mother with a beautiful cherub, my 13 old son, who struggles with ADHD, depression, anxiety and most recently Lyme disease.

I have encountered a battle with the school system trying to get services for my son. As I was told he didn't qualify over and over again. My son has struggled within the West Fargo School system since he started school in first grade. Recently within the Jr. High school setting he has been tested, retested and retested thus denied an IEP or 504 plan.

My son has been wrongfully mistreated within the school due to lack of understanding by school professionals regarding his disability. He has been expelled for being hyper, sent to youth-works and contained in a classroom with youth that are delinquents with no plan of action to aide with his disability except punitive punishment. My son gained a significant amount of weight, lost his self-esteem, stopped engaging in activities (swimming, band, sports) due to his feelings of inadequacy. My son would come home from school and cry, state I hate school, and everyone hates me. C-----, and the list goes on. The lack of understanding for youth with learning disabilities has caused hardships within my family system.

I reached out to my son's pediatrician for help with the matter, when she suggested I contact Deb Jendro with Federation of Families to support me with battling the school. I met with Deb J what a life saver for myself and my son. She has supported us with letters, physical support at the school meetings and connecting with Protection and Advocacy as the school continued to drag their feet and refuse to see that my son needed help not punishment. My son has been impacted by this school system and he has lost valuable learning time due to ignorance with understanding disabilities.

I'm so grateful for these two programs and ladies who stood by my son to fight for services he needed to function in school. It took my advocating for my son for the school to get a resource room this year. I'm sure my son is not the only youth misunderstood, mislabeled and punished for being disabled.

Our schools need to gain insight with learning how to work with youth with disabilities. Our youth dropout rate is high, kids turn to drugs, alcohol and suicide as a result of lack of empathy within the educational system.

We have a long road to go to make change, but I can guarantee you, I as a mother will not stop until justice is served to help our youth who are disabled, mislabeled, and misunderstood. I'm a mother who will not let the system ruin my son.

I plead with you listen as our leaders of tomorrow need help with mental health issues, substance abuse and compassion for people of color.( Let's fight to remove the stigma for mental health within our schools)

Respectfully,

Proud Parent of a youth who has a chance due to support from his mother, Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and Protection and Advocacy.

Connie L