

March 27, 2007

The Senate Education Committee  
P. O. Box 12068 Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

**Re: Testimony in Opposition of Texas Senate Bill 1000 for educating children with autism**

Good morning, my name is Nagla Moussa, first and foremost I am a parent of a son diagnosed with autism at age 4, and who has attended public schools for the past 16 years. I also am a former president of the Autism Society of Collin County and the new president elect of the Autism Society of Collin County. I am a member of the advisory committee for Lifepath System, formerly known as MHMR and a volunteer parent advocate. As a parent of a son who has autism, I am opposed to SB 1000 because it does nothing to improve and strengthen public education. I am opposed to SB1000 because it will leave many students behind in public schools that have less funds and most of the students with autism. As the Ohio voucher program proved, only 8% of students with autism use the autism voucher program, and 92% remain in a public school system with that is struggling financially. I am opposed to SB 1000 because it will create an environment where desperate parents of children with autism who will turn to private schools finding themselves in a place where schools do not have to abide by IDEA and No Child left Behind Act. Parents who chose these private schools will not have the safety net of mediation or due process. I am opposed to SB 1000 because it creates unequal educational opportunities, parents in more affluent school districts will receive more money for the voucher and parents who can afford to supplement the school voucher will make sure their children have the best programs, while families who can only spend the voucher money will end up in less desirable programs, and that is the majority of families in Texas.

I applaud senator Shapiro's effort to improve education for children with autism, but let's start by improving public education. SB 1000 is not the answer, providing a quality free public education for all students with autism in Texas is the answer. This can be done by supporting the special education initiative filed in the senate and the house last week. This can be done by training teachers in the best ways to educate children with autism, this can be done by implementing research based curriculum for students with autism across Texas. This can be done by funding schools in a way where they can provide more support services like speech and occupational therapy for students with autism. Finally this can be done by putting education first in Texas.

In order to create equal opportunities in education, public funds should support a free and appropriate public education.

SB 1000 is not the best way to educate students with autism in Texas, making sure our public schools are well equipped with well trained teachers, research based curriculum and appropriate support services is the best way to educate students with autism.

Sincerely,

*Nagla Moussa*

*2232 Cross Bend*

*Plano, TX 75023*