

SUBMISSION BY KIRSTEEN HENEGHAN

1. As a mum of two children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), I fully support the bill.
2. The Autism Bill will bring Scotland into line with England and therefore provide an equal standing for all citizens of the United Kingdom with ASD.
3. As the branch officer of the Aberdeen Parent Branch of the National Autistic Society, I frequently meet and speak to families and adults who are waiting or struggling to be seen and assessed for ASD.
4. It seems to be a lottery depending on where you are in the country as to how long you wait or even if there are the specialists available to provide assessment especially for adults.
5. I believe that money would be saved if there was autism legislation because there would be a legal duty placed on local authorities; it would provide continuity across the country and would be a fairer system for all, as everybody would be working to the same strategy instead of, as there is at the moment, huge gaps and inconsistencies from one local authority to another.
6. Most local authorities, if not all, have no idea how many children and adults there are with ASD in their region. By forcing them to undertake accurate assessment of the number of people with ASD, better planning could be put in place for the present and future.
7. At present only an estimated 13% of adults with ASD are in full time employment. This is a shocking statistic as there are many able people with ASD who, with the right support, could be an asset to any workplace.
8. Also those not able to work could have better planning for their futures put in place. There are too many people with ASD who are shut away at home with their families and have no access to any support.
9. The bill for psychiatric support would come down as many people with ASD develop depression and other mental illnesses as a result of the negative experiences that they face on a daily basis.
10. As an ex-psychiatric nurse, I know how important a good self esteem and sense of purpose is and many children with ASD on leaving school spend the rest of their lives on benefits unable to work. Planning for the future is key and simply doesn't happen.
11. Because autism is generally a "hidden disability", as most people with ASD

look completely "normal", they face prejudice and judgement on a daily basis.

12. If a person had a broken leg, they would not be expected to run and allowances and provision would be made to help them. A person with ASD, for example, is constantly bombarded with sensory messages - too loud , too quiet, too busy, too bright etc - these sensory feelings can physically hurt but when they meltdown and can't cope, judgements are made.
13. Training is key and should definitely be mandatory for teachers, pupil support assistants, public sector workers, hospital workers etc. In this society of political correctness, when everyone is so concerned about not offending people from different races or with disabilities, and rightly so, sadly the same standards aren't applied to those with ASD.
14. Accountability is key; by appointing people to be in charge of autism leadership at a local level then services could be coordinated and standards met and maintained. If nothing happens now then there is a whole generation of children with ASD who are going to be costing the tax payer a whole lot more as they will not have access to employment or the facilities they need to be useful responsible and, above all, happy and fulfilled members of society.
15. I run a club for children with ASD and they have so much to give and to see them struggle and the impact that has on their families is heartbreaking.
16. Without an Autism Bill we will carry on striving to get our children what they need but there are many vulnerable people with ASD who are unable to do this.

Kirsteen Heneghan
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