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MARY BETH WALSH
Assemblywoman 112th District

June 4, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am writing to ask you to please consider allowing in-person summer school and therapies this summer to our special needs preschool and school-aged students.

As the parent of an adult son on the autism spectrum, I am very familiar with the value of summer school to special education students. Let me just give you the example of my son Terry.

Terry was diagnosed with PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder), part of the autism spectrum, when he was three years old. He received speech and language therapy. We always noticed that during school breaks even as short as a week, Terry's skills would slip. Also, autistic children crave structure and predictability. When school was not in session, that structure was absent. Kids act out and lose skills remarkably fast. Typically developing kids dream of summer vacation and loose, unstructured time, but for our kids with special needs, it is a nightmare.

We were told time and again that addressing my son's special needs with intensity early in life was a chance to "rewire" his brain, and we heard (and I have seen) countless examples of timely intervention taking kids even out of their diagnosis over time. The converse is also true. If kids do not receive early intervention, delivered with enough intensity by caring providers, kids will not make gains or keep the gains they've made. They will lose skills they and the adults in their lives have worked so hard to give them.

I think that reinstating the ability for kids from 3-21 years of age to receive in-person instruction over the summer would do so much good, and I firmly believe that it could be done safely and responsibly. Speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy: these are not interventions that can easily be done over Zoom or Skype. They need to be done in person. For my son, just getting him to sit in a chair across from an instructor and to make appropriate eye contact was a huge gain.

My son is now 27, doing well and is living a full and productive life - thank God. I sincerely ask you to allow other children in our State the chance to make gains and to keep the skills they've learned.

In addition to sharing my own personal experience with you, I have also enclosed a letter from Crossroads Center for Children which I believe further outlines the importance of reinstating these critical programs and services for students with special needs. Crossroads is a fantastic school located in the Capital Region, and I believe that the voices of the students, parents and faculty of these types of organizations need to be heard.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Beth Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Mary Beth Walsh
112th Assembly District