

January 13, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
Finance Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chair, HELP Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Dodd
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Chair, Energy and Commerce Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable George Miller
Chair, Education and Labor Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Autism Training Provisions in House-Senate Conference on Health Reform

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), we are writing to express our deep gratitude and strong support for critical provisions of the Affordable Health Care for America Act (HR 3962). AUCD is in strong support of many provisions in both the House and Senate health reform bills. We ask that, as you work to reconcile the differences between the two bills, you retain Section 2527 of the House bill, which creates training initiatives on autism to expand the capacity of states to better detect and provide evidence-based services to individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

The prevalence of autism appears to be growing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it now affects one in every 110 children. The information we get from our Centers and families demonstrates that our current service system is unprepared to meet the growing needs of individuals with autism and their families. There are pressing needs for trained professionals and providers to better serve children and adults with autism with the latest evidence-based information and effective practices. Furthermore, early detection and treatment are essential, yet families of children with autism often face numerous obstacles for obtaining high quality services for their children. Similarly, adults with autism face long waiting lists and many barriers in obtaining appropriate community-based supports and services to enable them to participate fully in society. The House bill's training initiative provisions will greatly help to address these issues by expanding the capacity of states to better detect and provide evidence-based services to individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

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Executive Director

The membership of AUCD includes a network of 67 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities located in every US state and territory. These University Centers provide research, education and service to further independence, productivity and quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities, including autism. University Centers collaborate with stakeholders in states to identify and address training needs in creative and effective ways. As the prevalence of autism has risen, University Centers have initiated many activities to help meet the growing need for children, adults and families. Sec. 2527 builds upon these efforts by expanding the capacity of University Centers to focus on interdisciplinary training of professionals and providers in the area of autism, provide technical assistance, and disseminate information on effective community-based treatment, interventions and services. The inclusion of this section would bring critically needed resources into every state to immediately begin to address the need for qualified personnel.

AUCD applauds your commitment to individuals with autism and their families and looks forward to working with you towards the ultimate inclusion of the autism training initiative provisions in comprehensive health care reform legislation.

Sincerely,



Tamar Heller, PhD
President



George Jesien, PhD
Executive Director