

**Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities
(LEND) Programs**

**FY 2008 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations Bill
Health Resources and Services Administration
Maternal and Child Health Bureau
Special Projects of Regional and National Significance**

	2006	2007	2008 President	2008 AUCD Request
LENDs	\$18,667,644	\$18,667,644	\$18,667,644	\$24,067,644

Recommendation: Appropriate \$24,067,664, an increase of \$5,400,000, within the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance set-aside for Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Programs. This additional funding will enhance the capacity of LEND programs to train professionals in the interdisciplinary care and treatment of children with autism spectrum disorder and related neurodevelopmental disorders. The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) also supports an overall increase of \$31,000,000 for the MCH Block Grant to bring it up to a total of \$724,000,000 in FY 2008.

Background: Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Programs are a unique national resource established to improve the health status of infants, children and adolescents with or at risk for neurodevelopmental and related disabilities and their families. This is accomplished through the interdisciplinary training of professionals for leadership roles in the provision of health and related care, continuing education, technical assistance, research and consultation. The LEND Program focuses on the special health care needs of children with a wide range of neurodevelopmental, metabolic and genetic disorders, including autism spectrum disorder. Currently, there are 35 LENDs in 28 states and the District of Columbia. All LEND programs operate within a university system and most have collaborative arrangements with local university hospitals, children’s hospitals, and/or health care centers. Each LEND receives core funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, a division of the Health Resources and Services Administration.

Last year, Congress passed and the President signed the Combating Autism Act (PL 109-416) authorizing the Secretary to expand existing or develop new Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Programs in states that do not have such a program. The intent of Congress was to provide each of the existing 35 LENDs additional funding to train developmental pediatricians, clinical psychologists, and other diagnosticians and interventionists in the coming year. In states that do not have a LEND Program, Congress intended to provide funding to establish such programs. The \$5.4 million for FY 2008 would begin this expansion by providing funds to expand one-half of the existing LEND Programs for this purpose and adding four new LEND Programs in states that do not currently have one.

Justification: Autism is increasing at epidemic proportions. In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 1 in 150 American children have autism, making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined. It is increasingly difficult for these individuals to obtain appropriate diagnosis, early intervention and treatment services because of the lack of health and allied health care providers and the failure to update the education and training of health care professionals and other elements of the health care system. LEND Programs are exceptionally qualified to address the shortage of professionals needed to address this national problem. LEND Programs have achieved wide-ranging success in the maternal and child health field by developing and promoting best practices, producing exceptional clinicians and leaders in a variety of disciplines and furthering systems change. The key components of LEND Programs include: interdisciplinary training, leadership skill development, culturally competent clinical training, community outreach and continuing education, translating research to practice, technical assistance, collaboration, and product development and dissemination. With additional funds, the Secretary will also be able to expand existing interdisciplinary training opportunities and the number of sites able to diagnose or rule out individuals with autism spectrum disorders and related neurodevelopmental disabilities and reduce the waiting lists for services to these individuals and their families.

Recommended Report Language: The Committee has also provided \$24,067,644 within the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance (SPRANS) set-aside to enhance the capacity of existing LEND programs and expand the number of sites and professionals trained to diagnose, treat and provide interventions to individuals with autism spectrum disorder as authorized by the Combating Autism Act. This increase will help these programs initiate or expand their work in the area of interdisciplinary leadership training to meet the needs of children with autism spectrum disorder and related neurodevelopmental disabilities.