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Joint Statement of AUCD, Autism Society and NDSC on new U.S. Department of Education Guidance on IDEA and VR Funding for Postsecondary Students with ID

Washington D.C.–September 18, 2019 – Three national organizations: the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), Autism Society of America, and the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) are pleased that the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released guidance yesterday that will facilitate federal funding for dually-enrolled and postsecondary students with intellectual disabilities. The [ED press release](#) “...Makes Clear Federal Funds can be used to Support Dual Enrollment, Postsecondary Options for Students and Youth with Disabilities”. The [guidance](#) is in the form of Questions and Answers and an Appendix and clarifies that Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and vocational rehabilitation (VR) funds may be used to support students with intellectual disability (ID) in postsecondary programs. It is an important step in the right direction. While IDEA, The Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act (WIOA) and the Higher Education Act intend for such funding to be available, guidance from ED has sometimes been interpreted to deny services and funding.

Stephanie Smith Lee, NDSC Senior Policy Advisor, stated, “We appreciate OSERS Assistant Secretary Johnny Collett and OPE Assistant Secretary Robert King spearheading this effort to issue guidance. It is very clear and straightforward that VR funds may be used to support these students. The guidance on the use of IDEA funds is a little more complex and raises new questions. We look forward to working with the Department to clarify those issues.”

Kim Musheno, Vice President of Public Policy for the Autism Society of America stated, “The research demonstrates that having the opportunity to participate in higher education leads to significantly better employment outcomes and independent living. The funding supported by law and clarified by this guidance will make a real difference to our students, families and colleges.”

Rylin Rodgers, AUCD Director of Public Policy, stated, “AUCD is pleased that this new guidance is informed by [a letter to Secretary DeVos](#) with a comprehensive report, [Addressing the Policy Tangle: Students with Intellectual Disability and the Path to Postsecondary Education, Employment and Community Living](#). This is a model of the important role that advocates in the field can play in helping to shape public policy.” The report was prepared on behalf of the Inclusive Higher Education Committee (IHEC) Co-Chaired by Lee, Musheno, and AUCD Director of Policy Innovation, Denise Rozell.

The report outlines the legal and policy background of the issue and need for new guidance to meet the Congressional intent to encourage postsecondary education and competitive, integrated employment for individuals with ID. There are now 275 postsecondary programs for students with ID listed on the Think College database at: <https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>.

About Association on University Centers on Disability (AUCD)

The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), located in Silver Spring, MD, promotes and supports a national network of interdisciplinary centers on disabilities. The members of AUCD represent every U.S. state and territory. AUCD and its members work to advance policy and practice through research, education, leadership, and services for and with individuals with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and communities. To learn more about AUCD visit www.aucd.org

About Autism Society of America

The Autism Society of America has been improving the lives of all affected by autism for over 50 years and envisions a world where individuals and families living with autism are able to maximize their quality of life, are treated with the highest level of dignity, and live in a society in which their talents and skills are appreciated and valued. We provide advocacy, education, information and referral, support in the community at national, state and local levels through our strong nationwide network of Affiliates. www.autism-society.org

About National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC)

The National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to an improved world for individuals with Down syndrome. Founded in 1973, the NDSC is a leading national resource of support and information for anyone touched by or seeking to learn about Down syndrome, from the moment of a prenatal diagnosis through adulthood. The purpose of the NDSC is to promote the interests of people with Down syndrome and their families through advocacy, public awareness, and information. To learn more about the National Down Syndrome Congress visit www.ndsccenter.org.

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