

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

MONMOUTH
112 Village Center Drive
Freehold, NJ 07728-2510
(732) 780-3035

OCEAN
405 Route 539
Plumsted, NJ 08514-2303
(732) 350-2300; (609) 286-2571

MERCER
4573 South Broad Street
Hamilton, NJ 08620-2215
(609) 585-7878



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

June 6, 2017

Chairman Tom Cole
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education and Related Agencies
Washington DC, 20515

Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education and Related Agencies
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of the more than one million American families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD, hereafter referred to as autism), I thank the Subcommittee for its leadership in designating autism funding in previous appropriations bills and I urge you to fully fund the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 funding levels for the Department of Health and Human Services' autism activities as authorized by the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support Act (or Autism CARES Act/PL 113-157), in your FY 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Specifically, I am writing in response to the zeroing out of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Autism and other developmental disabilities budget in the President's FY 2018 Budget Request. This critically important program, which was last authorized for \$48 million annually for five years in Autism CARES, legislation which passed the House and Senate unanimously in 2014, was funded at a level of \$47 million in FY 2016 and FY 2017.

As the Cofounder and Cochairman of the Coalition for Autism Research and Education (CARE), I am writing to request that you include at least \$52 million for Autism and other developmental disabilities in the FY 2018 Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. While I understand the fiscal restraints governing your decisions in preparing this bill, I am hopeful that you will include this funding to continue the progress we have made in understanding, diagnosing and treating autism.

According to the latest released data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), estimates are that 1 in 68 children have been identified with autism. Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic and social groups. In many cases, it impairs a person's ability to communicate and to relate to others, and remains a life-long challenge, not only for those who have been diagnosed, but for parents and other family members as well. The estimated total cost per year for children with autism in the United States is between \$11.5 billion and \$60.9 billion.

Of this amount, I am specifically requesting \$31,317,485 million for the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program, which was also zeroed out in the President's Budget. This is the amount that was provided in FY 2017 that resulted in an increased number of sites available to screen, diagnose and provide evidence-based interventions to individuals with ASD/Developmental Disability (DD) as authorized under the Autism CARES Act. This request would maintain the funding for these programs.

As you are likely aware, LEND programs provide advanced training to students and fellows from at least 12 disciplines in the identification, assessment, and treatment of children and youth with a wide range of developmental disabilities, including ASD. The LEND network is currently made up of 52 programs in 44 states that are making significant strides toward improved screening and diagnosis of autism among younger children and helping to train healthcare professionals who treat a number of different developmental and intellectual disabilities.

According to a Report to Congress on the Combating Autism Act, the LEND programs provided interdisciplinary diagnostic evaluations for close to 56,000 infants and children in 2012. With the expanded number of LEND grantees and trainees, the LEND programs provided interdisciplinary diagnostic evaluations for over 94,000 infants and children in 2014-15. By continuing to meet the growing demand for these services, the LEND programs are reducing wait times for diagnostic evaluation and entry into intervention services.

The House and Senate passed the Autism CARES Act unanimously. Accordingly, I ask for your strong support for funding in the FY2018 Labor-HHS-Education bill especially to enable vigorous efforts to pursue much needed advances in autism research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Smith", is written over a horizontal line.

Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress