

For Release on April 14, 2011

Contact: Kim Musheno
Director of Legislative Affairs
301-588-8252 ext. 222
kmusheno@aucd.org

AUCD Statement on Introduction of the Autism Service and Workforce Acceleration Act

SILVER SPRING, MD (April 14, 2011) — The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) applauds Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) for introducing the Autism Service and Workforce Acceleration Act today.

The prevalence of autism and related developmental disabilities has increased dramatically in recent years with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates showing that one in every 110 children (one in 70 for boys) are affected. Our current service system is unprepared to meet the growing needs of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. It is clear from the information we have received from our University Centers and families that additional resources are needed. To meet the urgent needs of the autism community we need to provide continuing education and training. There is also a need to disseminate findings of new evidence-based practices to professionals currently in the field, support workers, family members and self-advocates in the most effective and efficient manner possible. The Autism Services and Workforce Acceleration Act greatly helps to address these issues by creating training initiatives to expand interdisciplinary training and continuing education on autism spectrum disorders. The bill also supports demonstration projects to develop services and supports for youth transitioning into postsecondary education or jobs.

“Our national policies often forget that children and adolescents grow up to be adults with their own set of needed services and supports. It is urgent that we develop systematic structures and supports to provide for the translation of research into practice, ensure the use of evidence based interventions and provide a quality standard to the services and supports provided to adults with developmental disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum,” said Tamar Heller, Ph.D., director of the University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) for the State of Illinois. She continued, “One avenue for quickly and cost-effectively reaching all 50 states is to charge the UCEDDs to provide a range of training and technical assistance to education, transition planning, employment, respite providers, as well as self-advocates and families. Clearly more resources are needed to develop evidence-

based and promising interventions; however, we must also develop the infrastructure to make sure that these findings are translated into daily practice as effectively and efficiently as possible.” It is for these reasons that AUCD strongly supports introduction of the Autism Service and Workforce Acceleration Act, which is a welcome compliment to the Combating Autism Act of 2006, legislation that AUCD is in support of reauthorizing before many of its provisions expire on September 30, 2011. The Combating Autism Act has been instrumental in expanding the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities (LEND) programs. The LEND training program is administered by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau to train clinicians on the use of validated screening tools to diagnose Autism Spectrum Disorders. The pairing of the Autism Service and Workforce Acceleration Act with the reauthorization of the Combating Autism Act fills a gap between the critical areas of clinical research and the provision of supports and services.

The membership of AUCD includes a network of 67 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities located in every U.S. 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. For more information and a national directory of Centers, see AUCD’s website at www.aucd.org.

###