

For Immediate Release

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National Disability Association Applauds Bipartisan Action on Autism *Bill to Reauthorize Combating Autism Act Introduced*

SILVER SPRING, MD (May 26, 2011) — AUCD commends Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Michael Enzi (R-WY) for their leadership and willingness to meet the needs of individuals with autism and their families by introducing the bipartisan “Combating Autism Reauthorization Act of 2011.” This bill extends the current law for three years.

The prevalence of autism is growing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, autism now affects one in every 110 children with a 57% increase from 2002 to 2006. The Combating Autism Act has shown significant progress in identifying possible causes and in increasing the capacity of professionals to screen, diagnose, treat and support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). However, substantial gaps still remain, which is why it is so critical to reauthorize the Combating Autism Act and sustain the momentum of the work that has begun under this law.

A congressionally-mandated report prepared by the Office of Autism Research Coordination at the National Institutes of Health and released in December, documents that the Combating Autism Act has expanded research and surveillance and addresses the growing need for appropriately trained professionals able to assess, diagnose, treat and support individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other developmental disabilities.

“One of the greatest needs identified during the development of the legislation is the lack of trained professionals to provide identification, diagnostic and clinical services for children with ASD and other developmental disabilities,” said Daniel Crimmins, PhD, AUCD President and Director of the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities in Georgia. “The law provided for the expansion of the existing members of the AUCD network, such as the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) programs, and other networks, such as the Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP) interdisciplinary training programs, to focus on training health professionals in the use of valid, reliable screening and diagnostic tools and in the provision of evidence-based interventions for children with ASD. These training efforts are effectively

reducing barriers to screening and diagnosis by increasing health professional capacity and awareness about ASD among parents and early childhood providers.”

Though the report documents significant progress, CDC data indicate a critical need for improved screening and access to early evaluation and diagnostic evaluations. The typical time gap from developmental concern to diagnosis is over 2 years. “With a continued focus on ASD awareness and training, within both the public and healthcare spheres, this critical time gap can and should be reduced,” said George Jesien, Ph.D. AUCD’s Executive Director. Increased attention is being given to pinpointing underserved communities where diagnostic and intervention support are in the greatest need, Jesien emphasized. Without this law, national efforts in research, training and state service development will cease or be sharply curtailed,” says Crimmins. Through CAA funding, the Federal coordination provided by the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC), will continue to identify key research and service priorities and foster communication and collaboration among Federal agencies, private foundation partners and the public.

The Combating Autism Act must be reauthorized before September when most provisions are set to expire. The House of Representatives has not yet introduced a bill. AUCD will work with Congress and other advocacy partners to ensure that gaps in the research, training and service system coordination and development are allowed to continue by working to have the law reauthorized in a timely way.

AUCD is a national network of 67 University Centers for Excellence (UCEDD); 39 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) programs; and 15 Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRC). As the prevalence of autism has risen, University Centers have initiated many activities to help meet the growing need for children, adults, and families. Together, these programs provide a national impact through direct services, the development of new professionals, and the application of new knowledge generated from research. For more information and a national directory of Centers, see AUCD’s website at www.aucd.org.

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For more information, see the full text of the congressional report: “[Report to Congress on Activities Related to Autism Spectrum Disorders and Other Developmental Disabilities Under the Combating Autism Act of 2006](#) (FY 2006-FY 2009).