

The Honorable John P. Murtha, Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
Room H-149 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable C.W. Bill Young, Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murtha and Ranking Member Young:

On behalf of the estimated 1.77 million American families affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD, hereafter referred to as autism), we respectfully request that you provide \$15 million in the Fiscal Year 2008 Defense Appropriations Bill for autism research. This program would be funded in the U.S. Army Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation Medical Advanced Technology account.

Many DoD families are touched by autism. The most recent prevalence data indicate that 1 in 150 children have an autism spectrum disorder. Based on this prevalence rate, as many as 12,000 children in military families (active duty, reserve and guard) may have autism. These families are affected substantially by the financial and emotional costs of raising a child with autism. Autism's impact also extends to the performance and readiness of service members who have children with autism and their units. A service member with a child with autism may be restricted in terms of assignments and 'deployability,' thus potentially placing a higher burden on others who serve.

Moreover, the military life is particularly difficult for children with autism and their families. A specific feature of autism is extreme difficulty with life, routine, or environment changes of any kind. Therefore, these children need a set routine, stability, and continuity of services and relationships. Military life by its nature provides few of these needs. Frequent changes of residence and schools, and the prolonged absences of a parent make life much more difficult for the child with autism and his or her caretakers. When one parent is away, the spouse or other caretaker at home must bear both the normal burdens of that situation, and the additional challenge of raising a child with autism facing extraordinary stresses. This situation is likely to weaken the morale of the parent serving in the military as well as the caretaker at home.

For these reasons, we feel strongly that the autism epidemic warrants an additional investment via the Department of Defense. It is well known that children with autism, if they receive prompt treatment and early intervention services, can improve their long-term functional prospects dramatically. Additional research will help to improve treatment and intervention. The results will directly serve the interests of DoD families touched by autism as well as the medical, educational, healthcare and service professionals who serve the needs of the autism community within and beyond DoD.

With the number of Americans diagnosed as having autism or ASD continuing to rise at an alarming rate, Congress must redouble our commitment to increasing and enhancing the federal government's contribution to autism research. Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and other governmental agencies, autism is growing at a startling rate of 10-17 percent per year. At this rate, it is estimated that the prevalence of autism could reach 4 million Americans in the next decade.

Simply put, our government cannot afford not to make this additional commitment to autism research. Autism places tremendous health, financial, and emotional strains on our nation's families, including those in the military, and the problem will only worsen unless an all-out research campaign is launched to discover causes, enhance therapies and, ultimately, prevent or cure autism.

We thank you for considering this most important request. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Tim Lynagh in the office of Rep. Chris Smith (5-3765), Kenneth DeGraff in the office of Rep. Mike Doyle at (5-2135) or Peter Kay in the office of Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (5-5516).

Sincerely,