

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 23, 2025

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair
Labor, HHS, Education,
& Related Agencies Subcommittee
Subcommittee Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Labor, HHS, Education,
& Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Capito and Ranking Member Baldwin:

As you and your colleagues work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations bills, we respectfully request that you fully fund programs that focus on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) research, screening, and support activities as authorized by the *Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support Act of 202*-(P.L. 118-80), which passed unanimously in the Senate and by an overwhelming, bipartisan vote in the House last year.

National prevalence numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that 1 in 31 children, and 1 in 45 adults are autistic. Thanks to the bipartisan emphasis on investing in federal research, data collection, and training programs for health professionals over the past two decades, we have seen tremendous progress in our understanding of autism spectrum disorder and improvements in interventions and services. At the same time, our increased understanding has allowed us to better identify the tremendous gaps in care and services required to meet the varying needs of people across the autism spectrum. Continuing evidence- and science-based federal research investments will help improve outcomes and mitigate costs through earlier diagnosis, personalized interventions, and greater access to services and supports across the lifespan.

Federal research and program investment has been and will continue to be vital to support children and adults with autism and help improve safe and evidence-based earlier diagnosis, treatments for co-occurring medical symptoms, personalized interventions, and greater access to services and supports. Programs run by the CDC, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) are essential to the welfare of children and adults and their families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

As you work to develop the FY 2026 bill, we urge you to provide the highest level of funding to maintain and build upon the programs that have consistently been supported by this Committee on a bipartisan basis. These activities have been reauthorized by the bipartisan *Autism CARES Act of 2024* across several Department of Health and Human Services agencies, and include:

- NIH evidence-based, scientific research on a range of critical areas, including: genomics and biomarkers, communication, and early screening, services and interventions across the lifespan. The NIH, as authorized by the *Autism CARES Act of 2024*, also funds Autism Centers of Excellence, which execute key areas of autism research;
- CDC evidence-based programs including the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, “Learn the Signs, Act Early” health education program, and Study to Explore Early Development (SEED);

- The HRSA Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program, Autism Intervention Research Networks on Physical and Behavioral Health, Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP) Training Program, and DBP Research Network, and several other important autism research programs;
- The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) and Office of the National Autism Coordinator.

Further, given the significant research needs articulated in the IACC's most recent Strategic Plan, as well as new directives included in the *Autism CARES Act of 2024*, we respectfully request that you include the following report language to accompany the FY 2026 appropriations bill:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).— The Committee strongly encourages NIH to support greater investment in research, particularly in areas outlined in the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee's (IACC) Strategic Plan for Autism Spectrum Disorder, and urges the NIH to ensure that all research activities for autism follow widely-accepted scientific practices in order to ensure research integrity. In addition, the Autism CARES Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-80) included several new directives that the NIH should implement expeditiously. These include releasing an annual budget estimate for autism research for FY 2026 based on the IACC Strategic Plan, ensuring research efforts reflect the entire population of individuals with ASD, and creating a new process for the public to obtain information on all existing and planned autism research activities as well as allowing the public to provide comments. The Committee also directs the NIH to fund autism research activities at least at the FY 2024 expenditure level, and that any new large-scale autism research initiative is funded with additional funding above FY 2024 expenditure levels. Pursuant to the Autism CARES Act of 2024, the Committee also urges the prompt re-establishment of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee and that among the non-public members, that the Secretary appoints experienced, leading licensed and board-certified researchers in the field of autism science.

We know that more funding is needed to build on the great progress that has been made. We urge you to support strong funding in FY 2026 for programs that help us better screen, diagnose, and provide services and support for people with autism spectrum disorder and their caregivers. These programs will make a real difference in the lives of millions of Americans. Thank you for considering this request.

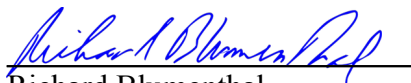
Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



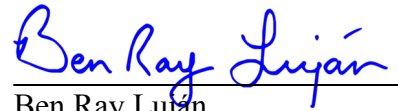
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



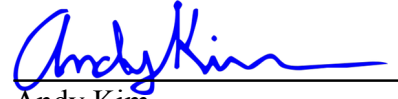
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Andy Kim
United States Senator