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DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

Support for the “Training and Research for Autism Improvements Nationwide (TRAIN) Act,” HR 5756
Excerpts of the Floor Statement by Congressman Chris Smith
September 22, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I want to thank my good friend for yielding, for his leadership, I want to thank my colleagues. This is truly a bipartisan issue. And I especially want to thank my good friend and colleague, Mike Doyle. We are co-chairs of the Autism Caucus. It shows that bipartisanship still survives, and for a tremendous cause, a good cause like combating autism, and it is great to join him in cosponsoring this bill. He is the prime sponsor and I am the principal co-sponsor.

I believe it is accurate to say that the provisions of this bill are not only important, but essential in providing tangible assistance to those with an autism spectrum disorder and their families. An implementation of the TRAIN Act will significantly expand the ranks of qualified service providers, who are equipped with the knowledge and tools of state-of-the-science, evidence-based educational, medical, and social interventions.

Personally, Mr. Speaker, I became involved in autism as far back as 1982, when I first visited Eden Institute in Princeton. Coincidentally, Eden is breaking ground tomorrow on a new uniquely designed autism school designed by Eden teachers who have utilized three decades of knowledge and best practices in teaching individuals with autism to reach their full potential. However, huge gaps in the federal response to autism came into sharp focus back in 1998, when I was visited by Bobbie and Billie Gallagher, the parents of two daughters with autism from my District who told me of their concerns about a perceived explosion in the prevalence of autism in Brick Township. Rosemarie and Geoff Dubrowsky, whose son Danny was diagnosed with autism as well in 1997, are another couple who told me of the realities, and they were very concerned about this prevalent spike. I would note parenthetically at the time the Centers for Disease Control spent a paltry \$287,000 per year, straight-lined '95, '96, '97 and 1998 – that doesn't even buy a desk, it's so little—now we're up to \$22 million.

After meeting with families, these families and others, we initiated an investigation led by the CDC and they confirmed that cases of autism were significantly higher than expected in Brick, but the evidence gathered indicated a larger, potentially nationwide prevalence problem. I then introduced a bill which was accepted by Chairman Mike Bilirakis as Title I of the Children's Health Act mandating increased surveillance. You can't fight something if you don't know the who, what, when, where and even the why of it. As established, the legislation created centers of excellence, and now we now know that nationwide autism affects 1 in every 110 children, 1 in 70 boys—sadly in my own state its even higher. Faced with this epidemic, Mike Doyle and I formed the Coalition on Autism Research and

Education, which today has 157 members.

The legislation we are considering today, the TRAIN Act, offers an opportunity for us to do something for the 1.5 million individuals living with autism every day.

The legislation authorizes grants to existing University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Services or comparable entities to provide individuals – including parents, vocational, educational, and health professionals - with interdisciplinary training, continuing education, technical assistance and information for the purpose of improving services to children and adults with autism and their families. The bill also provides for the establishment of up to 4 new University Centers for Developmental Disabilities, giving priority to minority institutions or institutions that would serve currently underserved populations.

Another important provision—a very important provision—is the selection of a nationwide organization to disseminate nationally, evidence-based best practices and other models, materials, and practices developed by the University Centers or from other sources, including development of a web portal. People need to know, really, the information because there's often a conflict about autism.

I urge Members to support this legislation, it's an excellent bill, and it will really help those who are afflicted. I yield back.