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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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April 25, 2022

The Honorable David E. Price
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development, and
and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
2108 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
374 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Special Children's Center
1400 Prospect St
Lakewood, NJ 08701
thecenternj.org

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

I write to respectfully request Community Project Funding for the Special Children's Center, located in Lakewood, New Jersey in my Congressional District (NJ-04).

The Special Children's Center is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that provides multi-faceted services for individuals with intellectual/developmental disorders (IDD) and complex special needs, from birth through adulthood. The Center is in all aspects a community center with a base of hundreds of eager community volunteers. This facility has been described as "lifesaving" in the services it provides to students and in the respite provided to families.

As children grow, needs change and adulthood is a difficult transition for all, even more so when there is a disability involved. This gap has led the Center to establish meaningful, productive, and comprehensive program for adults with IDD who age out of the school program.

The Special Children's Center is seeking funding to build a complete "Chef's Kitchen" which will be used for culinary therapy, vocational/job skills training in the culinary field, and teaching independent living skills. Culinary therapy is defined as, "The therapeutic technique which uses cooking, gastronomy, and an individual's personal, cultural and familial relationships with food to address the emotional and psychological problems faced by the individual, their families and groups." Culinary Therapy involves problem solving, time management, communication, teamwork, and focus.

Many young adults with IDD are unable to fulfill their potential as valuable community members because education and related services they receive in school end abruptly when they reach age 21 and graduate from high school. When that happens, often regression of skills begins to set in, along with social/emotional concerns. This places further burden on caregivers, effecting caregivers' health, well-being and often income potential.

The Chef's Kitchen, with permanent kitchen equipment and supplies, including convection ovens, refrigerators, mixers, sinks, ice makers, and freezers will help enhance and sustain skills and the quality of life of young adults with IDD, thereby reducing the number of necessary supports. The associated curriculum will focus on the dual approach of:

- 1) Culinary Therapy - life skills and independent living
 - a. self-care/ health and nutrition
 - b. executive function and social skills
 - c. recreation and leisure skill development
 - d. independent living skills

- 2) Vocational – Utilizing the new Chef's Kitchen, the vocational curriculum will include education, skill training, and support employment. It will be designed toward gainful independent employment.

In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that 1 in 54 children in the United States has autism—just one of the forms of IDD. In my home state of New Jersey, we have the second highest rate in the country with a staggering 1 in 32 children touched by ASD.

As the author of the *Autism CARES Act* and similar laws to help children and adults with autism, and as the co-chair of the House Autism Caucus, I have personally visited the Special Children's Center and have been deeply impressed by the dedication of the staff and curriculums offered. Their motto: "Special needs never takes a break, and neither do we."

Per the attached budget, the cost of the Chef's Kitchen project is \$370,507. This impressive project is widely supported by the local community, including by numerous families as well as State Senator Robert Singer, the Ocean County Board of Commissioners, and Lakewood Mayor Coles.

I certify that neither I nor my immediate family has any financial interest in this project. I appreciate the Committee's due consideration of this project. Please feel free to reach out to me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress