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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 28, 2021

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The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS,
Education and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you prepare the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, I write today to respectfully request Community Project Funding for the Shore Center for Students with Autism, located in Tinton Falls, New Jersey in my Congressional District, which is a lifeline to many public school students with Autism.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is “a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent impairments in social communication and social interaction, as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, leading to difficulty in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships with others.

In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that 1 in 54 children in the United States have ASD. And in my home state of New Jersey, that figure is even higher with a staggering estimate of 1 in 32 children.

The Shore Center for Students with Autism, operated by the Bayshore Jointure Commission, is a public, out-of-school-district placement for students with ASD aged 3 to 21. In addition to teaching general education curriculum aligned with New Jersey’s academic standards, the Shore Center also teaches students critical life skills, including vocational training and household management, so that one day the students can live as fully and independently as possible. Additionally, students receive any services they may require such as speech, occupational, physical, or behavioral therapy.

Though the Shore Center is a public school, because it’s an out-of-district placement their only source of funding is “tuition” that comes from the home school district of the students, and they can only budget annually based on projections of enrollment. A Community Project would enable them to augment the tuition funding received for their high-quality education and services and target it to upgrading assets within their vocational and independent living curriculum.

A Community Project for the Shore Center totaling \$56,200 out of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, specifically the Elementary and Secondary Education Innovation and Improvement account, would allow the Shore Center to create a living space with more traditional leisure components that would enable students aged 16 to 21, to practice activities and chores that take place in one's apartment or home.

Additionally, the Shore Center would expand their job sampling and vocational skills program to incorporate skills that focus on financial literacy and management, use of public transportation, more intensive job coaching and training, and extensive professional development for their staff.

Under their itemized budget, the Shore Center projects they would use approximately \$35,000 to repurpose a large classroom space and create an authentic apartment with bed, dressers, couches, TV, leisure activities, bathroom, and other real-life features. About \$10,000 would be expended to create a simulated everyday living experience for students 16-21. To expand job training program to include incorporation of financial management, use of public transportation and job retention they would use \$10,000, and the remaining \$11,200 would be used to develop a systematic professional development and coaching program for staff to help assist students in mastery of skills.

As the author of the Autism CARES Act and similar laws to help those touched by autism, and as the co-chair of the House Autism Caucus, I have been deeply impressed by the staff and curriculum offered at the Shore Project and believe that the modest request for \$56,200 will make an incalculable difference in the lives of their student's and family caregivers. By fostering the essential skills that adults with ASD need to gain meaningful employment and either live independently or be a more productive member of their household, the Shore Center excels at its mission.

This project is widely supported by the local community, including the Monmouth County Board of Commissioners and the Monmouth County Sherriff.

Thank you in advance for your full and fair consideration of my request for Community Project Funding for the Shore Center for Students with Autism. Please do not hesitate to be in touch with me or my staff should you have any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress