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By Appointment



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

April 28, 2021

CO-CHAIRMAN, TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS  
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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 New Jersey's statewide 800.4.AUTISM Helpline in order to expand its reach and positive impact helping those 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.

In the last several years, Congress has vastly increased federal funding to help combat autism, expand awareness, promote early interventions, and assist family caregivers. As the author of the Autism CARES Act, and similar laws to help those touched by autism, and as the co-chair of the 134-member House Autism Caucus, I have worked with your Subcommittee to expand the work at the CDC, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for better research on the causes and potentials therapies—as well as to fund programs to help parents and pediatricians know the signs of ASD.

Yet much more can be done including facilitating and directly connecting families with providers of services they so desperately need for the development of their children.

Thankfully, New Jersey's 800.4.AUTISM Helpline is working successfully to connect parents with the providers of effective services their children require. In fact, this

Helpline annually assists 1,350 individuals on average, and its companion website had 132,764 unique visitors in 2020.

Supported by Autism New Jersey and funding from the New Jersey Department of Health, the Helpline employs three trained individuals to aid callers and digital visitors, including a social worker, a parent of an adult with a developmental disability, and a bilingual attorney.

With the support of a Community Project approved by Congressional appropriators in the amount of \$196,000, for fiscal year 2022 the Helpline could hire three additional staff members including another Spanish speaker, an administrative assistant, and a data/technology coordinator.

In addition to the human resources provided by this Community Project, the Helpline would also be in a position to upgrade their hardware and software—new computers, phones, and teleconferencing software for important face to face conversations—as well as make website enhancements including translating more of their content into Spanish—New Jersey’s second most spoken language.

The need for this Helpline—and expanding its reach—has become even more apparent during the coronavirus pandemic. Individuals with disabilities and their families often face additional burdens and needs. These individuals and families encountered a severe “services cliff” without any warning or preparation when daily services they relied for their children suddenly became unavailable.

Ongoing stay-at-home orders have shuttered programs and cancelled services, contributing to the record number of visitors to the Helpline’s website in 2020. With the benefit of a Community Project, this Helpline—whether over the phone or virtually, and in English or Spanish—can reach more families in need of referral to services that will positively change the trajectory of their lives.

This request for New Jersey’s 800.4.AUTISM Helpline is widely supported by local elected officials across the state of New Jersey including the Monmouth County Board of Commissioners, State Assemblymen, and Township Councilmen.

Thank you in advance for your full and fair consideration of my request for Community Project Funding for New Jersey’s 800.4.AUTISM Helpline. 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