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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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April 25, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Monmouth Ocean Foundation for Children
900 Hope Rd
Tinton Falls, NJ 07724
moffc.org

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

I write to respectfully request Community Project Funding for the *Achieve Academy for Adults with Autism* in my Congressional District, to purchase capital assets for the Academy's extraordinary job training and life skills program.

By way of background, the Monmouth Ocean Foundation for Children (MOFFC) has been a leader in supporting and enriching the educational programs for local children with special needs since 1992. Over the last ten years, the Foundation has focused exclusively on financially supporting programs that enhance the lives of students aged 3 - 21 who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). During that time, MOFFC and its Trustees have forged incredible partnerships with programs and organizations that offer outstanding education and support for children with ASD.

To augment these programs—and address the dire need for ongoing support, training, and other services for *adults* with ASD—the MOFFC has established its largest and most important program to date, the Achieve Academy for Adults with Autism. This cutting-edge learning institution will pick up where the PK-12+ school programs end to help ensure that adults with autism can continue to grow, thrive, and develop—and be employed and independent members of society like their neuro-typical peers.

As you may be aware, once a student graduates from high school, it is difficult to find high-quality continuing education programs that will provide vocational training, job coaching, and other services necessary to help adults with autism. In addition, many adults who do not have real opportunities to practice and use everyday skills (which are typically at the core of their

PK-12+ education) experience regression and struggle to be engaged and/or independent members of their residence and their community.

The Achieve Academy will fill this need. Located on the Brookdale Community College Campus in Wall Township, the Achieve Academy will provide a daily continuing education program for adults with ASD with the goal of securing employment while reinforcing the essential life skills. The program will deliver ongoing pre-vocational training to prepare the young adults for the workplace, as well as provide instruction on the key skills needed to be successful at work.

Achieve Academy staff will also reinforce communication, fine and gross motor skills, and social/communication skills so that adult students may become and remain gainfully employed. To that end, the staff will work with local businesses and organizations to place clients in employment opportunities that meet the clients' skills and training and are of interest to the clients so that they have long careers in positions that are meaningful and fulfilling.

In addition to the pre-vocational and job coaching, while at the Achieve Academy, clients will continue to develop and reinforce their essential life skills, including, but not limited to personal hygiene; cooking, food preparation, and nutrition; daily domestic tasks such as laundry, cleaning, making the bed, and home organization; leisure skills; simulations of personal services such as visiting the dentist, hair stylist or the doctor; shopping; dining out; personal fitness; technology skills; daily communication and social skills.

All of the training and curricula are designed to help greatly enrich the lives of the Achieve Academy students and help support their families throughout adulthood.

As you may know, in New Jersey, the necessity of a program such as this cannot be overstated. The incidence of autism in New Jersey is the second highest in the country. In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that 1 in 54 children in the United States have ASD. Yet, in my home state of New Jersey, that figure is a staggering 1 in 32 children.

Additionally, according to Autism Speaks, over the next decade, an estimated 707,000 to 1,116,000 teens will enter adulthood and age out of school-based autism services. It is incumbent upon us to identify and support the most effective, practical, and life-affirming support programs this growing population. Research demonstrates that job activities that encourage independence reduce autism symptoms and increase daily living skills, and reduce isolation and costs of third-party care.

The building for the Achieve Academy has been secured, and the MOFFC has successfully raised a significant portion of the initial budget. However, in order to open and provide the services and training described above, the Achieve Academy is currently seeking \$400,000 to purchase hard assets including classroom furniture and equipment for pre-vocational training, appliances for the life and leisure skills training (such as a mock apartment, kitchen and laundry appliances, televisions and components, gaming equipment, cleaning tools, etc.), as well

as technologically advanced communication devices, client devices, and fitness and personal health equipment.

The Achieve Academy has extraordinary support in the community, including from numerous agencies and organizations that assist children and adults with disabilities, state legislators and county commissioners. The program has also received considerable press coverage [see additional submission documents].

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 personally visited the campus of the Achieve Academy for Adults with Autism, and I have been deeply impressed by the facility and program.

I thank you in advance for your full and fair consideration of my request for Community Project Funding for the Achieve Academy for Adults with Autism, and I hope you will not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions regarding this request.

I certify that neither I nor my immediate family has any financial interest in this project. I appreciate the Committee's consideration of this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress