



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS HAILS SENATOR ARLEN SPECTER'S PLANNED
INTRODUCTION OF THE CURES ACCELERATION NETWORK ACT**

**Legislation Would Dramatically Boost NIH Funding and Establish New Federal
Agency Focused on Bridging the Wide Gap Between Scientific Discovery
and Treatments for Diseases and Disorders**

NEW YORK, NY (April 25, 2009) – Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, today applauded Senator Arlen Specter's (R-PA) announcement that he would introduce the Cures Acceleration Network (CAN) Act, groundbreaking legislation focused on accelerating the process of moving the most promising research discoveries from the lab bench to the bedside. Senator Specter, who outlined CAN in a speech in Chicago today, plans to introduce the bill in the U.S. Senate on Tuesday.

The CAN Act would reauthorize the National Institutes of Health (NIH) at a new baseline funding level of \$40 billion per year, in essence making recently-added stimulus funds a permanent part of the NIH budget. The second major aspect of the bill is the creation of a new, independent federal agency, the Cures Acceleration Network, specifically tasked with more quickly translating research discoveries into practical medical applications.

"This legislation will create the urgency we desperately need at the federal level to push science toward real impact on people's lives," said Geraldine Dawson, PhD, Autism Speaks chief science officer. "In the area of autism research, in particular, much needs to be done to translate important discoveries into treatments and therapies that can help individuals living with autism today."

"Senator Specter's important legislation deserves the enthusiastic support of anyone who has been affected, directly or indirectly, by autism, cancer, diabetes and the other terrible diseases of our time," said Bob Wright, Autism Speaks co-founder. "Now is the time to redouble our federal government's commitment to science and innovation in the search for better treatments and cures."

According to Senator Specter, CAN will make awards outside of traditional funding streams with the goal of accelerating the development of cures and treatments, including drugs, medical devices and behavioral therapies. The new agency will have a flexible and expedited review process to get funds to grantees as quickly as possible.

According to Senator Specter, the CAN funding will be complementary to – and not competitive with NIH funding.

The Cures Acceleration Network will fund both researchers who have access to private matching funds and those who do not. Biotech companies, universities, research institutions, patient advocacy organizations and pharmaceutical companies will all be eligible to apply. A board comprised of businesspeople, scientists, patient advocates and others will evaluate grant proposals.

“Nothing is more important than curing the diseases that damage our spirits, hurt our families and take our lives,” said Senator Specter, himself a cancer survivor. “More money alone won’t get us faster cures...we must do this on the scale and with the focus of the way we sent astronauts to the moon. And we need to start now. Americans battling cancer, autism, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, diabetes and so many other dreaded diseases have not a minute to waste.”

To learn more about Autism Votes, an initiative of Autism Speaks focused on federal and state legislative advocacy, please visit www.autismvotes.org.

About Autism

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The prevalence of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

About Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks is the nation’s largest autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. Autism Speaks funds more than \$30 million each year in new autism research, in addition to supporting the Autism Treatment Network, Autism Genetic Resource Exchange, Autism Clinical Trials Network, Autism Tissue Program and a range of other scientific and medical programs. Notable awareness initiatives include the establishment of the annual United Nations-sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day on April 2 and an award-winning, multi-year national public service advertising campaign with the Ad Council. Autism Speaks’ family services efforts include the Autism Video Glossary, a 100 Day Kit for newly-diagnosed families, a School Community Tool Kit and the distribution of community grants to local service providers. Its government relations department, through its Autism Votes initiative, has played a critical role in securing federal legislation to advance the federal government’s response to autism, and has successfully advocated for insurance reform to require insurers to cover medically-necessary autism therapies. Each year, *Walk Now for Autism* fundraising events are held in more than 70 cities across the country, as well as Canada and the United Kingdom. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org.

About the Co-Founders

Autism Speaks was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Bob Wright is Senior Advisor at Lee Equity Partners

and served as vice chairman, General Electric, and chief executive officer of NBC and NBC Universal for more than twenty years. He also serves on the board of directors of the Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation and RAND Corporation. Suzanne Wright has an extensive history of active involvement in community and philanthropic endeavors, mostly directed toward helping children. She serves on the boards of several non-profit organizations and is also Trustee Emeritus of Sarah Lawrence College, her alma mater.

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