

UNITED STATES SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ
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CONTACT:

Menendez Press Office (202) 224-4744



MENENDEZ ANNOUNCES PASSAGE OF AUTISM BILL

Three Year Extension Heads Immediately to President's Desk for Signature

WASHINGTON - U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) today announced the Senate has approved the Combating Autism Reauthorization Act, overcoming prolonged Republican opposition. On the Senate's last night in session before the end of the fiscal year, Menendez was able to successfully negotiate an agreement in order to keep the vital autism research programs created under the Combating Autism Act (CAA) functioning for an additional three years. The CAA – which was set to expire at the end of the week – now heads directly to the President's desk for his signature.

"I'm so pleased that we were able to get this vital legislation sent to the President's desk for his signature," said Menendez. "This reauthorization had been blocked by a few Republicans for more than two weeks, causing families coping with autism in New Jersey and across our nation unnecessary anxiety over the fate of the research programs and support services they have come to rely upon. Last night's actions will provide families the security in knowing these programs will continue for another three years."

The Senate approved the measure on a voice vote last night, following passage by the House of Representatives on September 20, 2011. Menendez's Senate version of the legislation, S. 1094, had been approved unanimously by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) on September 7, 2011. Although his bipartisan bill was before the full Senate since September 13, it was being blocked – or "held" -- by a few Republicans.

Menendez brokered a deal that led to the objecting Senate Republicans lifting their hold on the legislation without having to amend the bill, sending it directly to the President for his signature. If the bill had been amended, it would have gone back to the House and required another vote for final passage, leading to further delay and uncertainty.

The CAA provides for autism surveillance programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as intervention and training programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration. Additionally, this legislation allows for the continuation of the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC), which is responsible for advising the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) on autism policies, coordinating the federal response to autism and developing the annual strategic plan for autism research. These programs have been critical in advancing research on the causes, diagnosis and treatments of autism.

"Reauthorizing the Combating Autism Act is a crucial step towards advancing our knowledge on autism. We are now able to ensure research programs continue finding breakthroughs in diagnosis and treatment, and that training and intervention programs continue providing families the tools they need to better understand and manage this increasingly prevalent affliction," Menendez said. "After prolonged and

unnecessary objections on the part of a few Senate Republicans, I am proud that we were able to pass this important legislation into law.”

Autism is the fastest-growing serious developmental disability in the country, affecting on average 1 in 110 children and 1 in 70 boys. In New Jersey, 1 in 94 children are affected with autism spectrum disorders, one of the highest rates in the nation. This year more children will be diagnosed with autism than with AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined.

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