



NEWS

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Autism Leaders Call on Senate to Act on Smith-Doyle Bill

House passed legislation, awaits Senate action

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In the wake of a key House vote last night, the nation's fight against the epidemic of autism is front and center as H.R. 2005, "[The Combating Autism Reauthorization Act](#)," a bipartisan bill authored by Congressman Chris Smith (NJ-04) with Rep. Mike Doyle (PA-14) as the prime cosponsor, passed the House and moves to the Senate. The measure will renew the nation's programs for autism early detection, surveillance, research, education, awareness and treatment.

"One percent of all our children have an autism spectrum disorder," said Smith, whose own state of New Jersey is believed to have the highest rate of autism in the country. **"That's unprecedented. It's a pandemic of developmental disabilities. There is a sense of urgency. This battle has not been won. Getting the legislation through the House was the first critical step and I am grateful that both Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor support the bill and the work that has been done at the federal level to help families with autism. Yesterday we passed it, today we're asking respectfully that the Senate take up H.R. 2005, the Combating Autism Reauthorization Act of 2011. I have spoken to some on the Senate side who have raised concerns and I am optimistic that these critical programs will be reauthorized and advanced."**

Smith and Doyle are co-chairs of the bipartisan Coalition on Autism Research and Education (CARE). The new legislation reauthorizes the Combating Autism Act (CAA) of 2006. The reauthorization of CAA would be for an additional three years, through September 30, 2014.

"I'm here today with my friend and co-chair of the Autism Caucus Congressman Smith to say how pleased we are that the House passed the Combating Autism Reauthorization Act yesterday on a voice vote," Doyle said. **"Over a million individuals are living with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and when you add in their families and caretakers, millions of Americans are affected by ASD. The Combating Autism Act, which was approved five years ago, provided funding for research related to autism spectrum disorder, early identification of autism, and promoting early intervention.**



Cong. Smith gestures to the Senate side of the Capitol after the House passed Smith's autism bill, which now awaits Senate action. Cong. Mike Doyle, the prime cosponsor of the bill, is at left.

“The Combating Autism Act has made a huge difference in the lives of thousands of autistic Americans and their families,” Doyle said. **“And while we have made important progress in research on autism within the past few years, much remains to learn about the risk factors and causes of this group of conditions. Consequently, it’s critical that Congress reauthorize the Combating Autism Act. With the Combating Autism Act authorization expiring next week, it is essential that the Senate act this week to pass legislation to reauthorize the Combating Autism Act – and I encourage my Senate colleagues to do so.”**

The bill passed unanimously in a voice vote Tuesday night, and now awaits Senate passage. The bill will continue the success of the CAA of 2006 by authorizing funding for programs at NIH, CDC, and HRSA for three additional years. Doyle and Smith were joined by: the President of the Autism Society of America, Scott Badesch; Autism Speaks Vice President Peter Bell, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Executive Director, Dr. George Jesien.

“We want to extend our greatest appreciation and thank you to Rep. Smith and Rep. Doyle for their outstanding leadership in getting the Combating Autism Act re-authorization approved by the House,” said Scott Badesch, President and Chief Operating Officer of the Autism Society. **“Both Reps. Smith and Doyle are true heroes of the autism community and unselfishly are helping the over 1,500,000 people who live with autism.”**

Jesien commented on the CAA’s importance to early screening and care.

“I have talked to families with children with developmental disabilities all over the country who tell me they have to wait for 3-6 months or more to get an appropriate screening and diagnosis,” Jesien said. **“Once these children receive a diagnosis of autism or other disability they sometimes have to wait another 6 months to get evidence-based interventions by trained professionals. The Combating Autism Act has led to earlier screenings and diagnoses and ultimately better outcomes and cost-savings for these families and the country.”**

Bell praised the CAA in changing lives.

“Since enacted, the CAA has become the model for responsible and effective federal funding on a major public health care issue,” Bell said. **“This act has resulted in meaningful progress in research, while also benefiting those living with autism today. We commend Congressmen Smith and Doyle for their leadership and look forward to swift passage by the Senate so the President can sign the reauthorization by next Friday.”**

CARE has consistently worked to increase federal support for autism initiatives, including autism programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health and the Health Resources and Services Administration.

Smith’s [Autism Statistics, Surveillance, Research and Epidemiology Act \(Title I, P.L. 106-310\)](#) recently marked its own 10th anniversary. The law authorized grants and contracts for the collection, analysis, and reporting of data on autism and pervasive developmental disabilities, and established regional centers of excellence in autism surveillance and epidemiology. In January 2011, a [report](#) required by the CAA, cosponsored by Smith and Doyle, described federal action undertaken since enactment of the CAA – mostly in the areas of research and services. The report describes autism-related research and service activities carried out by the federal government since enactment of the Combating Autism Act four years ago. It was released by the Dept. of Health and Human Services and the NIH. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) estimates that one out of every 110 children in the United States has an autism spectrum disorder.](#)