

June 1, 2011

The Honorable Daniel Inouye  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye and Ranking Member Cochran:

On behalf of the estimated 1.5 million American families affected by autism spectrum disorders, we ask that you include \$10 million for autism research in the FY 2012 Department of Defense (DoD) Appropriations Bill. The most recent prevalence data indicate that one of every 110 children in the United States has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. The autism rate is high among military families as well: in 2008, almost 11,000 military children had autism.

Autism places tremendous health, financial and emotional strains on our nation's families, including those in the military, and the problem will only worsen unless more research is done to discover the causes and, ultimately, ways to prevent or cure autism. Additional research will also help to improve treatment. It is well known that children with autism who receive prompt treatment and early intervention services can improve their long-term functional prospects dramatically.

Moreover, military life is particularly difficult for children with autism and their families. A specific feature of autism is extreme difficulty coping with disruption of routine or environment. Frequent changes of residence and schools, as often occur for military families, and the prolonged absence of a parent can make life more difficult for a child with autism and his or her caretakers. Furthermore, a service member with an autistic child may be affected in terms of assignments and deployments.

Simply put, our government must further its commitment to autism research. Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and other governmental agencies, autism is growing at a startling rate of 10 to 17 percent per year. At this rate, it is estimated that autism could affect four million Americans in the next decade.

