



December 15, 2007

Dear A-CHAMP [REDACTED] Membership,

According to recently released CDC study, 1 in 150 children in America today have an autism spectrum disorder. Yet for all of its prevalence, much remains to be discovered about autism, and many living with the disorder struggle to get the care and support that they need and deserve. As a cosponsor of the Combating Autism Act, which President Bush signed into law last December, I have fought to increase public awareness about autism and worked to provide increased federal support for autism research and treatment. As President, I would build upon this record and work to expand scientific research, treatment, care and support for those living with the disorder and their families.

As President, I would support an autism agenda that included significant funding for research into the possible environmental causes of autism, groundbreaking treatments, and new diagnostic techniques. Because there is no known cause and cure for this neurological disorder, we support continued research into the numerous environmental factors which have been suggested as possible causes of autism.

Research has shown that early diagnosis and treatment is essential in helping those with autism reach their fullest potential. We must ensure that all Americans living with autism have access to quality, affordable care and treatment. Funding for the National Institutes of Health pays enormous dividends to all of us in terms of longer and healthier lives and I supported the successful effort several years ago to double the NIH budget. We should not lose the momentum generated toward cures for many diseases, including autism. I support continued increased investments and recently joined with those advocating to increase the agency's budget by 6.7 percent each of the next three fiscal years. I believe we must continue to focus on improving the collaboration across the various federal agencies that address autism, to facilitate information sharing and development across agencies and fields of expertise.

In addition to expanding research into the causes and possible treatments for autism, we must provide greater support for those living with the disorder and their families. I have supported legislation to promote and ensure the education of disabled children and adults. In my early years in the Senate, I cosponsored what was then called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The legislation was designed to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs. Since then, the act has been amended several times to add provisions relating to the education of infants and toddlers and its name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. The original legislation included a provision to provide grants to states, with funding from the federal

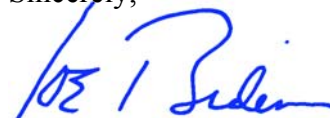
government reaching 40 percent of program costs by 1982. Unfortunately, the federal government has never reached this "full funding" level. I have repeatedly voted in favor of the federal government fulfilling its original commitment to pay 40 percent of the costs of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and in recent years have cosponsored the Educational Excellence for All Learners Acts, which expressed the sense of the Senate that IDEA should be fully funded. While I believe we must substantially overhaul NCLB, it did shine a light on one important, and that is the idea that we need to provide every child with a high quality education. We need to ensure everyone, including students with disabilities, have access to a high quality education.

As President, I would expand efforts to provide better long term care and support to those living with autism and their families. I strongly believe that every individual living with a disability should have the opportunity to live independently as he or she chooses. I have consistently opposed the unjustified segregation of people into institutions. It is discrimination pure and simple. That's why I am a cosponsor of the Community Choice Act of 2007 and have supported the precursor of this bill, the Medicaid Community Based Attendant Services and Supports Act (MiCASSA) since it was first introduced in the 107th Congress. The legislation would provide a variety of personal assistance services under the Medicaid program to enable disabled individuals to live at home rather than in institutions. Our long term care system has a heavy institutional bias and 65 percent of Medicaid long term care dollars pay for institutional services, while the remaining 25 percent must cover all the community based waivers, optional programs, etc. The Community Choices Act requires states to provide equal access to community attendant services and supports for eligible individuals in need of long term services and supports. To help states phase in the community attendant benefit, an enhanced match rate will be available for community attendant services and supports for the next five years. In addition, the legislation provides financial assistance to states as they develop and enhance comprehensive statewide systems of long term services and supports to provide access to consumer-directed community-based services and supports in the most integrated setting appropriate.

While we must ensure that we do all we can to allow people to live as independently as possible, we also have to recognize the support people receive from their family members to enable them to live at home or in a community-based setting. Many family members devote a significant portion of their time to help their loved ones with many aspects of their daily living. We must do all we can to reduce the burden on family caregivers and that is one of the reasons why I cosponsored the Lifespan Respite Care Act in the last Congress. In order to realize the goals of this act, I would insist that it receive full funding during the budget process.

We have made incredible progress in addressing autism--but we can do better. As President, I will work hard to support programs like those discussed above as well as develop new initiatives so that millions of Americans living with autism can live healthier, and happier lives. I thank you for the opportunity to discuss these issues and look forward to working with the Autism community to address this disorder.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Biden".

Sen. Joseph R. Biden, Jr.