

110th CONGRESS
2d Session
S. 2798
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

April 2, 2008

Mr. COLEMAN introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To establish a health and education grant program related to autism spectrum disorders, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Global Autism Assistance Act of 2008'.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

- (1) In February 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released data indicating that--
 - (A) the occurrence of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) increased between 1996 and 2006 from an estimated 1 in 500 to an estimated 1 in 150; and
 - (B) the behaviors of children who were classified as suffering from ASD were consistent with the DSM-IV-TR criteria for Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder--Not Otherwise Specified.
- (2) Autism is a complex neurological disorder that affects individuals in the areas of social interaction and communication. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, it affects each individual differently and to varying degrees of severity.
- (3) People afflicted with autism process and respond to information in unique ways. In some cases, coexisting medical issues may be present and aggressive or self-injurious behavior may occur.
- (4) The increased number of children diagnosed with autism is a growing and urgent concern for families, healthcare professionals, and educators. Health and education systems struggle to respond to the needs of the autistic population in a comprehensive manner.
- (5) The prevalence of autism in developing countries is growing rapidly. Health and education systems in these countries are particularly ill-equipped to deal with the issues surrounding this growth. According to expert estimates, there are approximately 2,500,000 people with an autism spectrum disorder in China and approximately 2,000,000 with such disorder in India. Although reliable statistics are difficult to come by, a large number of these people are believed to be children.
- (6) Children with autism who receive intensive and appropriate educational services before 5 years of age often make significant functional improvements. In the United States, significant efforts are being pursued to expand early diagnosis and the provision of these services.

(7) In a November 2007 report on the identification, evaluation, and management of children with autism, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended that all children should be screened twice for autism before 2 years of age, even if the children have no recognizable symptoms.

(8) Early screening and services for autism are sorely lacking in most of the developing world. United States expertise could be used to significantly aid children and families in developing countries for relatively small costs.

SEC. 3. GLOBAL AUTISM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(a) Establishment and Purpose- The Administrator, United States Agency for International Development (referred to in this section as the `Administrator') shall establish and administer a health and education grant program, to be known as the `Global Autism Assistance Program', to--

(1) support activities described in subsection (c)(2) by nongovernmental organizations and other service providers, including advocacy groups, focused on treating autism in developing countries; and

(2) establish the `teach the teachers' program described in subsection (d) to train health and education professionals working with children with autism in developing countries.

(b) Designation of Eligible Regions- Not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator, in consultation with knowledgeable autism organizations, such as the World Autism Organization, the Autism Society of America, and Autism Speaks, shall designate not fewer than 2 regions in developing countries that the Administrator determines--

(1) require assistance in dealing with autism; and

(2) have health and education professionals who are sufficiently familiar with issues related to autism to make effective use of the Global Autism Assistance Program.

(c) Selection of Implementing Nongovernmental Organization-

(1) IN GENERAL- Not later than 180 days after the designation of eligible regions under subsection (b), the Administrator shall select and provide funding to a nongovernmental organization with experience in autism-related issues to implement the Global Autism Assistance Program by awarding grants to local service providers and advocacy groups focused on autism.

(2) SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE- The implementing nongovernmental organization selected under paragraph (1) shall provide, contract for, and coordinate technical assistance in support of its mission in meeting the goals and purposes of this Act.

(3) ACTIVITIES- A local service provider or advocacy group shall use grant funds received under paragraph (1) to carry out any of the following activities:

(A) EDUCATION AND OUTREACH TO THE PUBLIC- Use public service announcements and other public media to help the public become more aware of the signs of autism so that children with autism can be diagnosed and treated earlier.

(B) SUPPORT TO FAMILIES- Develop resources for families, such as online Internet resource centers in local languages. Disseminate materials to parents of newly diagnosed children, such as information contained in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's publication entitled `Learn the Signs, Act Early' and other suitable alternatives. Disseminate educational aids and guides to help parents with their children's development.

(C) SUPPORT TO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS- Provide funding for schools or other educational institutions, focusing on teachers of the youngest students. Distribute equipment or materials referred to in subparagraph (B).

(D) SUPPORT TO CLINICS AND MEDICAL CENTERS- Provide funding to clinics and medical centers with proven records in addressing autism to assist with operating expenses, including personnel, equipment supplies, and facilities. Develop assessment testing for autism. Acquire specialized equipment, such as augmentative communication devices.

(E) TRANSLATION- Translate relevant English-language publications into the local languages spoken in the eligible regions designated pursuant to subsection (b).

(4) APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS-

(A) SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS- A local service provider or advocacy group desiring a grant under this subsection shall submit an application to the implementing nongovernmental organization at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as such organization may require.

(B) ESTABLISHMENT OF SCREENING BOARD-

(i) IN GENERAL- The implementing nongovernmental organization selected under paragraph (1) shall establish a screening board, to be known as the 'Project Advisory Board', to review and evaluate applications from local service providers or advocacy groups submitted under subparagraph (A).

(ii) MEMBERSHIP-

(I) APPOINTMENT OF VOTING MEMBERS- The implementing nongovernmental organization, in consultation with the Administrator, shall appoint at least 7 voting members of the Project Advisory Board who are members of autism advocacy groups, professionals working with autism, or otherwise associated with the autism community, including--

(aa) at least 2 parents from different families of individuals with autism;

(bb) at least 1 medical professional working with autism;

(cc) at least 1 teacher of individuals with autism; and

(dd) at least 1 individual who has autism.

(II) TERMS- Each member appointed under subclause (I)--

(aa) shall serve for a term of 1 year;

(bb) may serve up to 3 consecutive terms; and

(cc) may continue to serve after the expiration of the term of such member until such time as a successor is appointed.

(III) SELECTION CRITERIA- In appointing members to the Project Advisory Board under subclause (I), the implementing nongovernmental organization shall attempt to--

(aa) ensure objectivity and balance;

(bb) reduce the potential for conflicts of interest; and

(cc) include individuals with experience working in the developing world.

(IV) APPOINTMENT OF NON-VOTING MEMBERS- The Administrator shall appoint as many non-voting members to the Project Advisory Board as the Administrator determines appropriate.

(d) Teach the Teachers-

(1) IN GENERAL- The implementing nongovernmental organization, acting on behalf of the Administrator and in consultation with the Project Advisory Board, shall establish a program, to be known as the 'Teach the Teachers Program', to--

(A) identify health and education professionals to receive specialized training for teaching and working with youth with autism, including training conducted in 2- or 3-day workshops at locations within 1 of the 2 regions designated pursuant to subsection (b); and

(B) conduct training through 2- or 3-day biomedical conferences in the 2 regions designated pursuant to subsection (b), including--

(i) bringing medical and psychological specialists from the United States to train and educate parents and health professionals who deal with autism;

(ii) training related to biomedical interventions that can affect autism;

(iii) training on how nutrition and various metabolic issues can impact behavior;

(iv) training on the role of applied behavioral analysis; and

(v) various occupational and speech therapies in fighting autism.

(e) Authorization of Appropriations- There are authorized to be appropriated to the Administrator to carry out this section--

(1) \$3,000,000 for fiscal year 2009;

(2) \$3,000,000 for fiscal year 2010; and

(3) \$4,000,000 for fiscal year 2011.

END