

HELPING HANDS FOR AUTISM ACT OF 2008

SPONSORED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

An Act to Increase Housing, Awareness, and Navigation Demonstration Services (HANDS) for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

TITLE I: AUTISM NAVIGATOR

The Helping HANDS for Autism Act creates a grant program to provide autism navigator services to help families of individuals with autism spectrum disorders 'navigate' the complex, fragmented, and often confusing web of services and care that they need. Navigators will help guide families to current health, education, housing and social services that are often available to individuals in the autism spectrum. Too often families feel overwhelmed after diagnosis and often lost as to where to turn for help. For example, this program will help connect families to important treatment options soon after diagnosis, help families identify education options, help coordinate individuals' care and community support. This program would provide a trained, knowledgeable hand to help families from the moment of diagnosis throughout their child's development.

TITLE II: AUTISM AWARENESS

This bill provides for the development, demonstration and dissemination of a standard curriculum for the training of first responders (police, fire departments, emergency medical technicians and other volunteers) in assisting individuals with autism and other cognitive behavioral disabilities. It provides grants to states and local government to support training of first responders. People with developmental disabilities, including autism, have up to seven times more contact with law enforcement officers than others, according to an article in the F.B.I. Law Enforcement Bulletin in April 2001. That is why training is so important. Something as simple as first responders turning off flashing lights and sirens on a police car could make the difference between a peaceful or chaotic encounter.

TITLE III: HOME OF THEIR OWN

This bill also addresses the serious lack of sufficient housing for adults with autism. It creates a HUD task force comprised of appropriate national and state autism advocacy groups, community-based organizations and parents who are charged with developing a housing demonstration grant program for adults with autism. The goal of the grant program is to provide individualized housing and services to adults with autism spectrum disorders.

SUPPORTED BY:

Autism Speaks

New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community (COSAC)