BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS

On February 12, President Trump transmitted his Budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2019 to Congress. The Autism Society provided a summary analyzing the impact on programs that support people with disabilities immediately following its release. The Budget makes significant cuts to numerous programs that support people with disabilities and other vulnerable people.

The President’s Budget is just the first step in year-long budget and appropriations process. In the week before the budget was released, congressional leaders came to an agreement on a top-line number for discretionary spending for Fiscal Year 2018 that began on October 1, 2017. This deal will allow the Congress to finalize the 12 annual appropriations bills, hopefully before the next continuing resolution (CR) expires on March 23. Congress will then have to start working on passing annual appropriations bills for the Fiscal Year 2019. The budget deal to lift the caps on discretionary spending will help smooth this process in an election year.

The Autism Society will be monitoring this process closely and advocating for the highest possible funding for programs important to the individuals and families we serve.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Last week, the House of Representatives passed the ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017 (H.R. 620) by a vote of 225-192. This bill prevents lawsuits over architectural barriers violating the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) unless an individual provides "specific enough" notice and allows 120 days for a business to correct that barrier. Please use this link to see how your Representative voted on the ADA Education and Reform Act of 2017 and thank members that voted against the bill. The Autism Society sent a letter to Congress in opposition to the bill, held a conference call with affiliate leaders, participated in a national call-in day, issued an action alert and issued a statement following passage. In addition, the CCD Rights Task Force created a webpage with resources for advocates that includes a CCD statement of Kim Musheno, current chair of CCD.

There is no Senate companion bill to date. Affiliates are encouraged to use the resources to continue to educate Senators about the how this measure would severely weaken rights to access for people with disabilities. Also see a joint statement by Senators Bob Casey (D-PA), Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) considering this bill in the Senate.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Senate Health, Education, and Labor (HELP) Committee is beginning to draft a bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA). Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) are seeking comments. If you have ideas for better including students with autism into higher education programs, please send comments to HigherEducation2018@help.senate.gov with a copy to kmusheno@autism-society.org.

In 2006, the Higher Education Act created the Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID). The Autism Society participates on a working committee developing recommendations to improve the TPSID programs and has assisted in developing a sign on letter, which you can sign onto using the Google form linked to the letter. You can also use it as a sample to develop your own comments.

PCPID RELEASES REPORT ON DIRECT CARE PROFESSIONALS
The President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities (PCPID) has released its 2017 report, *America’s Direct Support Workforce Crisis: Effects on People with Intellectual Disabilities, Families, Communities and the U.S. Economy*. The report describes the current state of the DSP workforce as a “crisis,” noting that the average direct support professional wage is $10.72, most work two or three jobs, and the average annual DSP turnover rate is 45%. This report explores how these issues affect individuals, families, and human services systems; the factors that contribute to these issues; and promising practices to strengthen the direct support workforce.