IGNITE! In Brief...

- The Autism Society launches online Elections Center.
- The Autism Society joins national coalition partners to host national call-in day in support Money Follows the Person reauthorization. See Facebook event to participate.
- The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act goes before Senate HELP Committee.
- The upcoming National Conference features a policy track to inform advocates of current federal policy initiatives and what to discuss during Hill visits.
- This and much more below.

Immigration

A number of national disability and other human and civil rights groups have issued statements condemning the Administration’s new “zero tolerance” policy related to immigrants and refugees crossing the U.S. border. The policy calls for children to be removed from their parents and placed for an often indeterminate period of time in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The new policy announced by U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions in May has led to a over 2,000 children being separated from their parents since it went into effect. The Autism Society is also concerned that very little is currently known about how infants and children, including those with disabilities, are being treated in the detention centers. The Autism Society is monitoring these new developments closely. Please see the following statements by several national disability groups, one of which is by the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, chaired by the Autism Society’s Vice President of Public Policy.

- Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
- The Arc of the United States
- Autistic Self-Advocacy Network
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
- American Psychological Association
- American Association of People with Disabilities

Voter Education/Autism Society Election Center

On June 11, the US Supreme Court ruled (5-4) in Husted v. A. Philip Randolph Institute to uphold the practices used by Ohio to remove voters from the state's voter rolls. This practice cancels the registration of voters who chose not to vote and who then fail to respond to a notice. This ruling could further marginalize millions of voters including those with disabilities and other already underrepresented groups because of existing barriers to voting, such as inaccessible polling places, equipment, and transportation. This decision may also increase the likelihood that other states will enact similar voter suppression tactics and undermine the fundamental right to vote.

This decision makes it even more imperative that state advocates help educate voters. The Autism Society now has an online Election Center. Visitors to the Center only need to enter an address to find information on how to register, where to vote, primary election dates, and information about candidates running for local, state and federal offices. Please visit the Election Center to find out more and feel free to link to the site from affiliate websites.

Money Follows the Person Call-In Day
The Autism Society is co-sponsoring a national call-in day tomorrow to urge Members of Congress to reauthorize the Money Follows the Person program by passing the Empower Care Act. Our coalition picked Friday, June 22, to coincide with the 19th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s Olmstead decision.

The Money Follows the Person (MFP) Rebalancing Demonstration Grant helps states rebalance their Medicaid long-term care systems. Over 75,151 people with chronic conditions and disabilities have transitioned from institutions back into the community through MFP programs as of December 2016. Some states have used these funds to eliminate barriers in state law, state Medicaid plans, and state budgets that restrict the use of Medicaid funds to let people get long-term care in the settings of their choice.

The Affordable Care Act strengthened and expanded the MFP program allowing more states to apply. There are currently forty-three states and the District of Columbia participating in the demonstration. Unfortunately, the program expired and Congress must reauthorize the program for it to continue to benefit states in their efforts to provide community services.

Autism Society affiliates are encouraged to call their members of Congress to ask them to co-sponsor and pass the EMPOWER Care Act or simply use the sample, editable letter in the Autism Society Action Center to email your Members. See the Facebook event for more information.

Health Care

The “Health Policy Consensus Group,” led by former Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) and composed of several conservative think tank groups, on Tuesday released a new plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The group has been working with Senate Republicans, a group of corporations, and the White House, which supports the plan. Some Senate Republicans have stated they plan to act on the legislation by the end of August. The first step would be to pass a budget bill that provides authority to pass the repeal bill on a party-line vote. The House Budget Committee is scheduled to begin that process this week.

This plan includes some of the worst elements of the failed Graham-Cassidy repeal bill. “Graham-Cassidy 2.0,” as some are calling this new plan, would lead to the same disastrous results: Loss of health care for millions; protections for those with pre-existing conditions; destabilization of the marketplace.

The new plan follows soon after the Trump Administration’s decision not to defend the ACA in court, instead asking the courts to eliminate the ACA’s prohibitions on denying coverage based on pre-existing conditions and on charging people with pre-existing conditions higher premiums. Its release also coincides with the Administration’s issuance of a final rule expanding Association Health Plans, a rule that will also weaken (though not eliminate) protections for people with pre-existing conditions.

Together, these actions demonstrate that the Administration and Congress will continue to make repealing the Affordable Care Act a priority. The Autism Society will work in coalition with other national, state, and local advocates to oppose this new plan. Congress should be working to strengthen our health care system, not weaken it. See also CCD Statement on the Budget proposal and an analysis by by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Education

The Senate HELP Committee has scheduled on June 26 consideration of a bill to reauthorize the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) Act. While the Autism Society has not seen the bill, it is our understanding that the committee is drafting the bill in a bipartisan fashion. The Career and Technical Education program offers the potential for students with disabilities to use high school toward preparation for the workforce by encouraging specific career pathways. While there is a paucity of research on the intersection of CTE programs and disability, studies that do exist have shown that providing career preparation and transition services as early as possible has the potential to provide an important platform for students with disabilities to gain access to career pathways. The CCD Education Task Force, of which Kim Musheno co-chairs, sent a letter to the Senate Committee leaders with recommendations to ensure full access of these programs to students with
disabilities. The Autism Society will continue to monitor this bill’s progress.

*Food Security*

The U.S. House of Representatives plans to vote a second time on a bill to eliminate or reduce basic food assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for roughly 2 million people. Roughly 1 in 4 non-elderly SNAP beneficiaries, or 11 million people, have a disability. SNAP helps people pay for groceries and put food on the table.

The House has already voted once, on May 18, on a bill that would subject millions of people who rely on SNAP to sweeping new work and reporting requirements (the timing may change, if proponents are not sure they have the votes). These changes would punish people who lose their jobs and can’t find a new one, can’t meet the potential new strict work or training requirements, or can’t get an exemption. Roughly 2 million people would see their benefits cut, or cut off, over 10 years – including many people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and their families.

National disability advocates are urging the House to, once again, reject these harsh cuts. For more information, see the [CCD fact sheet on SNAP](https://www.ccd.org/fact-sheets/snap) and people with disabilities.

*Electronic Visit Verification*

The Autism Society signed on to a letter prepared by the Consortium for Citizens (CCD) to express support for passing bills to delay in the implementation of Electronic Visit Verification (EVV). Both H.R. 6042 and H.R. 5912 include implementation delays and increased stakeholder engagement which we strongly support. The House bill may be considered under suspension of the rules (special rule for non-controversial bills).

Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) is a telephone and computer-based system used to verify electronically that a personal attendant provides services for a client. The 21st Century CURES Act of 2016 requires that all states implement EVV for Medicaid-funded personal attendant services. This law outlines the requirements that states must meet, but provides little guidance on how states can fulfill the requirement. Advocates are concerned that this law may violate the principles of personal autonomy, privacy, and independence. The letter supports the bill that allows more time for careful planning and implementation of the program. The program is set to begin January 1, 2019. The Autism Society will continue to monitor the progress of this legislation.

*Appropriations*


The House draft bill includes $177.1 billion in discretionary funding, the same amount as the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 level. The bill targets investments in medical research, public health, biodefense, education, and activities that help promote "job readiness". The legislation also includes several provisions to "rein in unnecessary regulations" and to "protect the sanctity of life". The legislation contains several provisions to stop the implementation of ACA, including prohibiting the use of any new discretionary funding to implement ACA and providing no funding for navigators to help people get signed up. On a positive note, the bill provides a $12 million increase for special education state grants (IDEA Part B).

The House Appropriations Committee has postponed the full committee markup to Tuesday, June 26. The markup will be webcast [here](https://energycommerce.house.gov/news-center/press-releases) and the committee report (with more line item details) is expected to be posted following the markup. The Autism Society will keep affiliates informed as these funding bills move forward.

*Funding for Caregiving*

The Autism Society [signed on to a letter](https://energycommerce.house.gov/news-center/press-releases) in support of FY 2019 funding for the Lifespan Respite Care and the National Family
Caregiver Support Programs drafted by the National Respite Coalition. The letter urges appropriators to provide a modest $5 million increase for the Lifespan Respite Care Program and a 12% increase in funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Program.

This letter addresses the critical need for respite and points out that respite care can save money by helping to avoid out-of-home placements or hospitalization using a study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania. The study used Medicaid records of over 28,000 children with autism between the ages of 5 and 21. They found that for every $1,000 states spent on respite services in the previous 60 days, the odds of hospitalization dropped by 8 percent. For more information about respite care, see the ARCH National Respite Network page.

Social Security

The 2018 Social Security Trustees Report, came out with findings for the 2018 year. Most importantly, the report acknowledges that the Social Security system continues to work well and is supported by large reserves. The fully funded date for Disability Insurance (DI) continues to be extended and is now reported as 2032 with 97% of benefits payable thereafter. There are many possible solutions to be considered by the government to ensure that Social Security continues to function fully. Options include, raising the Social Security payroll tax cap over $128,400 so that the small percentage of workers who do not have to contribute fully based on all of their salaries become required to do so. Another possibility is to increase the payroll tax by a small percentage for both employers and workers. It might also be beneficial for the program to combine OASI and DI into one trust fund instead of the current two separate trusts. Autism Society supports a thoughtful approach to ensuring that Social Security is able to provide full benefits to all people including those with disabilities and their families. See CCD statement and talking points for more information about the impact of these new numbers.

Autism Society National Conference - Policy Sessions Announced!

The Autism Society is gearing for the 50th Annual Autism Society National Conference in Washington, D.C., July 10-12! This critical gathering of families, professionals, volunteers, and advocates aims to empower individuals with autism, their loved ones, and community members to become catalysts for change on Capitol Hill and in cities and states across the country. Our informative and engaging Public Policy sessions, led by some of the foremost national experts in federal disability policy, are sure to arm attendees with essential tools for participating in the political process. And conference Keynote, Mary Lazare, Deputy Administrator of the Administration for Community Living, will share insights from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. See the Schedule-at-a-Glance for details on our exciting line-up of speakers.

The conference culminates with a Day on the Hill, where advocates will unite to educate elected officials about home and community-based supports, education and employment policies and other critical issues impacting people with autism nationwide. Please schedule your appointments with your senators and representatives before you arrive in Washington for Day on the Hill. To learn more about our Day on the Hill policy priorities, sign-up for a special Issue Briefing Webinar presented by Vice President of Public Policy, Kim Musheno, Thursday, June 28, 2:00 p.m. (eastern).

There's still time to join us in D.C.! Register today and be a part of our movement to improve quality of life outcomes for all living with autism.