IGNITE! In Brief...

- Vice Chair Lori Ireland testified before House Small Business Committee.
- The Autism Society submitted comments to U.S. Education Department regarding proposed delay of Equity in IDEA regulations.
- Congress is working on two higher education bills. See recommendations benefiting students with disabilities put forward by the Autism Society and its coalition partners.
- ADAPT activist Bob Kafka and American Association of People with Disabilities' Zach Baldwin to present voter registration and civic engagement webinar for the Autism Society, Wednesday, May 23.
- Autism Society Affiliates and advocates are urged to partner with local housing agencies to apply for new "Mainstream" voucher funds.
- The upcoming Autism Society National Conference will feature a policy track to inform advocates of current federal policy initiatives and what to discuss during Hill visits.
- This and much more below.

Employment Hearing

On May 9, Autism Society’s Vice Chair, Lori Ireland, testified before the House Small Business Committee. The purpose of the hearing entitled, “Ready, Willing and Able to Work: How Small Businesses Empower People with Developmental Disabilities,” highlighted model businesses and initiatives providing opportunities for employment for people with autism and other developmental disabilities. Ireland, Founder of Extraordinary Adventures (EV), shared her small business model. She testified that EV currently operates six business employing about 50 individuals, all paying at least minimum wages. Ireland also provided possible recommendations for Congress to consider that would reduce work disincentives, including:

- Update and amend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), the Disabled Access Credit (DAC) and the Architectural and Transportation Barrier Removal deduction to expand eligibility criteria, increase financial benefits to eligible employers, and heighten programmatic oversight;

- Increase the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level and the resource limit for SSI;

- Enact changes to the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act to ensure the law works as intended; and

- Protect the Medicaid program and provide incentives to states to implement the option to buy into Medicaid for people with disabilities who work.
The entire hearing and testimony are archived on the committee website. See also Autism Society’s statement regarding the hearing and Ireland’s full testimony.

**Education**

### Education/IDEA

The Autism Society submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Education in response to a notice proposing to delay federal regulations intended to address the over- and under-identification of minority students in special education (see NPRM to Delay Equity in IDEA Regulations). The Autism Society urged the Department not to delay these regulations and to fully enforce the rule. States receiving funds under IDEA are required to provide for the collection and examination of data to determine if significant disproportionality, based on race and ethnicity, is occurring in the state and the local educational agencies (LEAs) of the state with respect to the identification of children as children with disabilities; placement in particular educational setting of such children; and the incidence, duration and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions. Unfortunately, many states are not complying with these provisions. The Equity in IDEA regulation set a common standard for identifying significant disproportionality of students within special education, school settings and discipline. The Rule also requires dedicated funding to serve these children. The Autism Society also signed on and helped develop more detailed comments submitted on behalf of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Education Task Force. The Department received 390 comments by the May 14 deadline.

### Higher Education

The House version of the Higher Education reauthorization bill, called the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform Act (PROSPER, HR 4508) is expected to be brought to the floor for a vote within the next two weeks. The bill was approved by the Education and the Workforce Committee in December. While the bill preserves the Transition Program for Postsecondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) and new data collection on students with disabilities, it does away with many personnel preparation and loan forgiveness programs, including for special education, as well as other disability-focused programs. It also does not take any of the recommendations of CCD to increase access and opportunities for students with disabilities. See the Autism Society’s Feb. 5 letter to the committee stating its concerns.

The Senate has not yet introduced a bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act but appears to be working on a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Career and Technical Education Act. Like the Higher Education Act, disability advocates are urging the Congress to include provisions that provide more access and opportunities for students with disabilities in career and technical education programs. The CCD Education Task Force, of which the Autism Society’s VP in Public Policy co-chairs, sent a letter to the Senate HELP Committee with a number of recommendations.

### Housing

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently issued a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for $100 million in new “Mainstream” housing vouchers for nonelderly people with disabilities. Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) are eligible to submit applications (due June 18). While not a requirement, HUD is providing points in this competitive process for applications that include partnerships between housing and services agencies, especially those that target housing assistance to people with
disabilities who are transitioning out of institutional or other segregated settings, at risk of institutionalization, homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. **It is very important that state and local disability advocates, including Autism Society affiliates, get involved to ensure local housing agencies apply for these new vouchers and partner with disability services agencies.** The Technical Assistance Collaborative joined with the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) to provide a webinar on May 1 explaining how to help states apply for these vouchers ([view the webinar archive here](#)).

The Autism Society signed on to a [CCD Housing Task Force letter](#) opposing the Administration’s proposal that would make it harder for people with disabilities to find affordable housing. The “Making Affordable Housing Work Act,” proposed recently by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), would impose rent increases on nearly all families across many essential HUD affordable housing programs and allow work requirements to maintain eligibility. The proposals are similar to those in a bill recently introduced by Representative Dennis Ross, called the “Promoting Resident Opportunity through Rent Reform Act.” Read the [entire letter](#) for more details about the impact of these proposals.

**Long-Term Services and Supports**

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) recently sent a revised [letter](#) to the House and Senate leaders in support of the Disability Integration Act (DIA, S. 910/H.R. 2472). The Autism Society signed the letter, along with 38 other national CCD members. The Disability Integration Act would compel states and insurance providers to cover long-term services and supports in the community so that people with disabilities will not be forced to live in institutions. For more information, see the [DIA campaign](#) website dedicated to its passage.

**Health Care**

A proposal to expand the availability of short-term health plans could have more substantial impacts than the administration calculated. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Office of the Actuary estimated that 600,000 fewer people would be enrolled in the marketplace in 2019 mostly because of the short-term plans that have limited benefits (the Administration had estimated 200,000). The report took into account the elimination of a penalty for not maintaining insurance coverage, which Congress repealed in December and takes effect in 2019. Because the plans would shift mostly young, healthy consumers who need less coverage out of the marketplace, increased marketplace premiums would cost $38.7 billion over 10 years, according to the report released on May 16.

**Food Insecurity**

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities sent a [letter](#) to U.S. House of Representative leadership opposing the Farm Bill, which is currently under House consideration, and rejecting efforts to undermine the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Roughly 11 million people with autism and other disabilities use SNAP to pay for groceries and put food on the table. If passed, the Farm Bill would institute harsh work requirements for struggling families to secure stable employment and cut food assistance for more than 2 million people nationwide. The House is currently debating a number of amendments and a vote is expected sometime tomorrow. Advocates are encouraged to share stories about how the potential loss of food assistance impacts you and your loved ones. Read the [CCD Preserve SNAP Fact Sheet](#) for more information.
**Autism Society Voter Education and Civic Engagement Webinar**

The Autism Society has invited Zach Baldwin, Director of Outreach for American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and ADAPT’s legendary Bob Kafka provide ideas for how our affiliates can become more engaged in voter education activities. This REV UP Campaign Webinar is scheduled for Wednesday, May 23, 4pm – 5pm EDT. The Autism Society encourages all affiliates and allies to participate. For more information and to register for the Webinar, please visit [http://bit.ly/REVUpWebinar](http://bit.ly/REVUpWebinar).

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**New Online Action Center**

The Autism Society is thrilled to announce the upcoming launch of our brand new online Action Center! Starting Monday, advocates can visit our Action Center to learn about critical federal legislation impacting millions living with autism and how to get engaged in the process. The Action Center will arm advocates with vital resources to get involved and make change. An election center will allow visitors to find out how to register to vote and will identify candidates running for local, state, and federal offices. Our new Action Center will offer simple access to your federal and state elected officials with just a few clicks making it easier for advocates to become involved! For more information about Autism Society Public Policy and Advocacy resources, visit our [website](http://www.autismsociety.org).

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**Autism Society National Conference and Exposition**

Register [today](http://www.autismsociety.org) for the 50th Annual Autism Society National Conference and Exposition, July 10 - 12, 2018, in Washington, D.C! This year's conference features innovative educational sessions, one-of-a-kind networking opportunities, great guest speakers, and a wealth of information on how the Autism Society’s Quality of Life goals can help shape the future of autism.

At our national conference, attendees will also engage with Congressional insiders and policy experts to gain insight on impacting change on Capitol Hill and at home. The event culminates with a Day on the Hill, where autism advocates from across the country meet with Congressional leaders and staff to discuss issues of critical importance to the autism community. View the [archived webinar recording](http://www.autismsociety.org) for information on scheduling legislative appointments and Hill Day updates. See the schedule at a glance and [register today](http://www.autismsociety.org)!