Dear Governor, State Legislator, or Members of Congress,

The Autism Society of ______ is pleased to see that the Federal Government is coordinating a Federal response to address the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also pleased that the Federal Government is assisting states with several robust economic stimulus packages.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. As the state plans and implements its emergency procedures to protect the health and wellness of its citizens during this health and economic crisis, we would like to ensure that individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, their families, and their providers, are taken into consideration.

The Autism Society represents individuals with autism and their families locally and statewide with information and referrals and community-based services and supports. The Society also interacts with state agencies and other community-based service organizations to provide training and technical assistance.

People with autism are or will be affected in many ways. Students with disabilities are being sent home from early intervention services, K-12 school programs, and post-secondary education programs. This action will prevent them from getting important services besides education, such as behavioral health services, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and mental health services, and, for some, free or reduced meals at school.

As residential and day programs close or reduce services, caregivers will be asked to fill the gaps. This may prevent parents from going to work, getting paid, or getting out of the house for essentials. These situations can lead to major economic losses for families.

Many individuals could be laid off temporarily or permanently due to the economic crisis. They will need additional assistance with food, housing, health care, and employment services.

People with autism often have co-occurring physical, behavioral, or mental health issues that require trained interdisciplinary pediatric and adult health professionals. If
they acquire COVID-19, they may need special, individualized care and treatment. They and their families will also need help getting extra medications and benefits planning.

As all citizens, people with autism will need factual information in plain, and accessible language, to understand how to stay safe, how to access care if they get sick, and how to deal with anxiety provoked by any type of national emergency that has no clear outcome or end date. The Autism Society is willing and ready to help disseminate information and guidance from federal, state and local authorities.

To ensure that people with autism included in the federal, state, and local planning, we provide the following recommendations:

With additional Medicaid funding coming to the state through the Families First Coronavirus Act, we urge the federal government to increase the FMAP by at least 10% and we urge the state to use the significant flexibility provided through the Medicaid program to provide additional funding for the following:

- Increased wages for Direct Support Professionals
- Direct Respite, Personal Care, and Family Caregiver services
- Transportation services
- Rehabilitation and habilitation
- Speech and language therapy
- Behavioral health, including ABA
- Case management services
- Increased Home and Community Based Services and Supports
- Comprehensive access to testing and treatment for COVID-19
- Access to Tele-health services

People with autism and other disabilities are often disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. With the additional funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, ensure people with autism can access SNAP program assistance without any work requirements.

Ensure that families caring for children and adults with autism qualify for any emergency paid leave and expanded family and medical leave. We support the provisions in the U.S. Senate bill, “Providing Americans Insured Days of (PAID) Leave Act” as the most comprehensive proposal to address this issue.

With schools closed for the foreseeable future, we urge that any online class procedure recognize that many families cannot afford to be connected to the internet or they might
not have the necessary training and hardware. Additional funding will be needed to help individuals and families get connected to the internet. This will help with online learning as well as being able to buy essential food and pharmaceuticals, and to participate in telehealth, if necessary.

Many individuals and families are able to survive day to day due to support from Social Security. We suggest raising the asset limit and increasing the Substantial Activity Level in Social Security so that people with autism who are working can be self-sufficient and families with children with autism have enough resources for disability-related expenses.

Thank you for considering the needs of individuals with autism during this unprecedented crisis. States must have the resources they need to ensure that even during this crisis that people with autism and other developmental disabilities have the services and support they need to stay safe and to live in the community. Between the heightened risk of transmission of the virus in institutional settings recognized in the Families First Act, these resources are even more important in this time of crisis. With federal support, states can take steps now to ensure that their workforce is prepared and that people with disabilities can continue to be supported in their homes and communities during this crisis.

Sincerely,