The Autism Society of America appreciates the efforts of IACC and its committee. Our organization, with its 74 affiliates throughout 33 states, has traditionally had representation on IACC.

Since 1965, the Autism Society of America has worked tirelessly to support the autism community through advocacy, education, information and referrals, support and community building. The Autism Society and its network of affiliates served over 668,000 individuals and families affected by autism in 2020.

We have made it our mission to improve the lives of all affected by autism, alongside our affiliates nationwide. Through the decades, the Autism Society has proudly served the autism community and established itself as the nation’s oldest and leading grassroots autism organization. Together, we are creating a more inclusive and accepting society full of opportunities for autistic

At the onset of COVID-19, were the first national autism organization to produce and share a COVID-19 toolkit. In 2020, more than 390,000 availed themselves of our digital and virtual supports; our toolkit has been accessed by more than 135,000 users; nearly 200,000 people have viewed our original Coronavirus Facebook Live Series – this nearly ¾ of a million interactions in 2020 alone.

This past April the Autism Society of America, proudly promoted throughout our affiliates Autism Acceptance month. Words matter! Which is why The Autism Society officially launched our campaign to encourage the media and government officials to move from using “Autism Awareness Month” to “Autism Acceptance Month”.

Autism advocates have used this term across the country for years because acceptance can help ignite change and inclusion for the autism community.

Working alongside autistic self-advocates, national disability organizations, and the greater autism community to federally advocate for April to be designated Autism Acceptance Month. This proclamation can lend credibility to more funding opportunities for autism support and services.

As you all know, the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) coordinates Federal efforts and provides advice to the Secretary of Health and Human Services on issues related to autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

As you know the mission of IAAC is to:
• Provide advice to the Secretary of Health and Human Services regarding Federal activities related to autism spectrum disorder.
• Facilitate the exchange of information on and coordination of ASD activities among the member agencies and organizations.
• Increase public understanding of the member agencies' activities, programs, policies, and research by providing a public forum for discussions related to ASD research and services.

While it is unfortunate we do not have official representation on the committee at this time we are hopeful that future committees will include representatives nominated by the largest and oldest organization in the nation we appreciate the opportunity to offer our concerns and ideas for which we would like IACC to focus some of its efforts.

In keeping with the intent of IACC’s third mission point – to understand member agencies’ activities for ASD services, I hope committee members have read our submitted comments. However, I would like to highlight a few items in our current strategic plan entitled “Our Vision for the Future”.
In addition to the legislative agenda of the Consortium for Citizens Disabilities which the Autism Society supports and is working diligently to see achieved, the Autism Society would like IACC to encourage other federal agencies to work with us in the following three areas which are strategic priorities for the Society:

**First Responder Training (Law Enforcement, Fire, EMT)** - The Society is developing teams to provide training locally through our affiliate network. The teams will include representatives from law enforcement, clinicians (i.e. Social Worker), Self-Advocates, parents, and researchers.

In addition, there will be subject matter experts included in the training and certification process for police departments, first responders, criminal justice professionals, district attorneys, and other law enforcement entities.

Efforts in this area will result in a reduction of injuries, a reduction of fatalities, and a reduction of arrests within the autism community.

**Water and Wandering Safety Programs** - The Society recognizes that drowning is among the leading causes of death in the autism community. A study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were significantly (60%) more likely to wander than children in other study groups. Furthermore, children with ASD are at a substantially increased risk of injury and mortality from drowning. This, coupled with the perils of wandering for the more vulnerable members of the community, necessitates the establishment of a Water and Wandering Safety program.

The Society will build a curriculum for water and wandering safety based on research and best practices. The Society will use a “train the trainer” model where we will arrange for Affiliate training. Ideally, Affiliates will complete a comprehensive training on water and wandering safety.

**Employment** - Recent data indicated that unemployment and underemployment in the autism community is as high as 90%. The Society recognizes the need for a
systemic change that provides opportunities for professional and non-professional employment, as well as the need to increase opportunities for competitive integrated employment and other services and supports in the community. Working with collaborators nationwide and members of the autism community, the Society will gather government officials, organized labor, educational institutions, employers, and individuals from the autism community to address this issue in a comprehensive approach.

The Society will provide the venue for conversation that leads to more autistic individuals being gainfully employed; this effort will look to increase opportunities, encourage job development, train companies, managers and coworkers, prepare qualified candidates and support individuals in their personal pursuit of success.

The Society will devise an approach to explore the issue of unemployment and underemployment in the ASD community.

The outcome will be an executable plan that can be implemented to reduce unemployment and underemployment.

The Society will develop ideas for national programs that significantly improve services to help people with autism find and retain work in their community.

These are not the only concerns for the autism community. We are also concerned with other issues including vaccine hesitancy, housing, transitional services, diversity and inclusion.

**We would welcome the assistance of IACC in coordinating interagency cooperation on our strategic initiatives and our legislative priorities that are singular focused on improved the lives of those impacted by autism**