



July 9, 2008

Dear Friends,

As I travel America on the campaign trail, I frequently hear from the countless families whose lives have been unexpectedly impacted by autism. The needs of individuals with autism and their families are reaching crisis proportions, and families are rightly demanding that we do something about it.

More than one in 150 children born today will be diagnosed with autism. It now affects almost 1.5 million Americans, and costs the U.S. \$ 90 billion each year. Autism has a significant impact on families -- bankruptcy and divorce rates of parents of children with autism are well above the national averages. Worse, there is no quantifiable way of determining how many future doctors, lawyers, teachers, or scientists autism has taken from society. Autism is a national crisis and the federal government must respond accordingly.

As you know, autism is a "spectrum disorder" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. Because of this, there is no single approach to resolving the many challenges of individuals with autism and their families. That is why I have supported a range of activities to improve the diagnosis, treatment, education, and lifespan needs of individuals with autism.

The first issue is to ensure that children with autism are diagnosed early -- when the condition is most treatable. All research indicates that children who receive comprehensive therapies can have dramatically improved outcomes. Federal efforts must support research to improve early diagnosis, intervention and treatment. I cosponsored and worked to enact the Combating Autism Act of 2006, which is helping to increase public awareness and screening of autism spectrum disorder, promotes the use of evidence-based interventions and created autism Centers of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder Research and Epidemiology. I strongly believe that diverse and extensive research will help us to determine the best ways to treat the disorder. Comprehensive research will give us the tools to protect children from autism in a way that is careful, thorough, and long-lasting.

We must also strengthen our educational system, so that our schools can meet the needs of children with autism. Well-trained special education teachers are essential to the health of the public school system and speak volumes to our ability to ensure basic civil rights. I have often stated that our nation's children deserve an equal opportunity to succeed. This opportunity should not stop short of children with autism, or any other developmental disability.



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But beyond the school system, we must ensure that individuals with autism have the services and supports they need throughout their lifespan. I'm sure that many of you today are wondering what will happen once the school bus stops coming. We must ensure that individuals with autism have the supports they need to find employment, housing, transportation, and other services they need to be productive, independent, and contributing members to their communities and to our great country.

I applaud the work of the Autism Society of America, which has been a leading voice on autism issues for more than 40 years. ASA continues to improve the lives of all affected by autism by increasing public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocating for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and providing the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy. ASA and its members have been a driving force for change in Washington and around the country, and I look forward to working with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,



John McCain



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