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Christie Administration Recognizes April as National Autism Awareness Month

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Trenton, NJ – This month, the Christie Administration is recognizing National Autism Awareness Month to highlight and increase participation in the many programs, services and support offered by the State to individuals with autism and their families. New Jersey has one of the best systems in the nation for identifying, diagnosing and caring for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Autism, a biologically-based disorder that affects the development and functioning of a person's verbal and non-verbal communication skills, social interactions and patterns of behavior, touches about 1 in 50 children in New Jersey, impacting many families across the Garden State.

"As government leaders, we have a moral obligation to recognize the individual and unique needs of every New Jerseyan with a developmental disability," said Governor Chris Christie. "With this year's 2013 budget, my Administration is reaffirming its commitment to help residents with autism and their families with the tools they need to lead fuller, more productive lives."

Throughout the month, members of the Administration, including First Lady Mary Pat Christie, will recognize the importance of autism awareness through visits and activities to showcase the work being done by individuals and organizations in New Jersey to serve people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder. Autism also is an advocacy area embraced by First Lady Mary Pat Christie to bring greater understanding of the developmental disability to the public at large.

The Christie Administration has acted on a commitment to support individuals with autism and their families:

- Making autism outreach a priority by supporting the Department of Human Service's Office of Autism;

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- Protecting funding for the Department of Health's Autism Registry to make it easier for families to be connected to the appropriate diagnostic treatment and support services in their community. As of November 2011, 8,350 children have been registered in the Autism Registry;
- Continuing to support families with children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth to age three with the Department of Health's Early Intervention Program services, including developmental intervention, speech, physical and occupational therapy. Nearly 21,500 children received early intervention services in state Fiscal Year 2011. The program receives more than \$140 million in state and federal funds - 92% percent of which goes directly to support services for children and families.
- Providing transition services for adults with dedicated funding for young adults with developmental disabilities who age out of the Department of Education's special education entitlement by ensuring a seamless transition to the Department of Human Services' adult day-programming
- Protecting funding that helps to create employment opportunities for New Jerseyans with disabilities through programs such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services and NJ WorkAbility.
- Providing for a realignment of programs for children with disabilities or in need of behavioral health services to occur in order to enable the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to provide family-oriented support services that care for the whole child.

Moreover, New Jersey is already a national leader in early intervention and education of children with autism and will soon have a center to coordinate academic and private research being done across the state on the cause of ASDs. The Governor's Council for Research and Treatment of Autism is set to establish the NJ Autism Center of Excellence this summer, consisting of a Coordinating Center and up to three program sites that will develop and conduct clinical research projects. In addition, \$8 million in grants will fund the latest research projects that have the potential to improve the physical and/or behavioral health and well-being of individuals with ASDs.

With increased concern in communities, continued demand for services and increasing estimates of ASD prevalence, Governor Christie and his Administration remain firmly committed to finding new and innovative ways to help New Jersey families impacted by ASD and improving the lives of their loved ones.

A copy of the Governor's proclamation is attached to the release.

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