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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Announces Drumthwacket to Light It Up Blue to Commemorate World Autism Awareness Day on Saturday April 2

Friday, April 1, 2016

Tags: [First Lady](#)



Trenton, NJ – Spotlighting autism awareness and honoring the many children and families impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in New Jersey and around the globe, First Lady Mary Pat Christie announced today that Drumthwacket will *Light It Up Blue* to mark the 7th annual World Autism Awareness Day on Saturday, April 2. In New Jersey, autism touches about one in 41 children.

“The Governor and I are proud to show our support and our strong commitment to all individuals and families affected by ASD,” said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. “New Jersey continues to make great strides in helping children and adults impacted by autism achieve a better quality of life while giving their families, who experience the challenges of autism every day, hope for the future.”

In addition, Governor Christie signed a proclamation declaring the month of April as Autism Awareness Month in New Jersey and Saturday April 2, 2016 as World Autism Day.

Last year, more than 18,000 buildings, businesses and homes across seven continents and in 142 countries illuminated in blue to recognize World Autism Awareness Day. These included the Empire State Building; Trafalgar Square in London; Old Parliament House in Australia and The Great Sphinx and Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. The array of buildings scheduled to *Light It Up Blue* for 2016 include: The Panama Canal; Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; The Great Buddha of Hyogo in Kobe, Japan; Petra archaeological site in Jordan; La Basilica de la Sagrada Familia in Spain; The Suez Canal; Canadian National Tower (CN Tower) and One World Trade Center.

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) represents a broad group of disorders that vary widely from mild to severe, and is characterized by difficulty with social interaction, communication, severely limited interests and repetitive behaviors.

Worldwide, there are more than 70 million people with autism. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) most recent data, nationally an average of 1 in 68 individuals have an ASD, 30 percent higher than the rate in 2008 (1 in 88). More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined. It is not yet known if New Jersey's higher rates are due to more accurate diagnoses or an increase in cases.

Recognizing the early signs of autism and early intervention can make a difference in improving outcomes for children with ASD. Fortunately, New Jersey is considered to have one of the best systems in the nation for identifying, diagnosing and documenting children with ASD. Governor Christie's fiscal year 2017 budget provides \$164 million for the Department of Health's Early Intervention System, which acts as early identification and referral, service coordination, evaluation/assessment, and developmental early intervention services for children from birth to three with developmental delays and disabilities.

Additionally, New Jersey is one of only eight states with an Autism Registry that requires reporting by neurologists, pediatricians, nurses and other autism providers so children can be referred for resources and services. More than 21,000 are registered with the Department of Health's Autism Registry and that has heightened awareness among parents and providers of indicators for Autism Spectrum Disorders.

New Jersey is also at the forefront of supporting autism research through the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism. The Council has provided more than \$35 million in research grants since 2008 as well as with a Center for Excellence located at Montclair State University. This past June, First Lady Mary Pat Christie announced \$4.4 million in grants awarded to establish three Autism Medical Homes to improve health outcomes for children with ASD as well as for advanced research in the understanding, prevention, evaluation and treatment of the biologically based disorder.

Families looking for a centralized source of information can call on the Office on Autism, which was established in August 2010 within the Department of Human Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities. The Office provides information from multiple state departments in an effort to assist families in understanding the options and process for accessing essential services, through its guide "[Autism. Navigating Through the Maze.](#)" accessible on the DHS website.

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