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Lt. Governor Guadagno Highlights Arts-Focused Educational Services for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities During Autism Awareness Month Visit to Paper Mill Playhouse

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Trenton, NJ – Continuing the Christie Administration's ongoing support of community-based services for individuals with developmental disabilities, Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno last evening visited Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn for a performance by the Theatre for Everyone program group. With its array of specialized, arts-focused programming for individuals with developmental disabilities, Paper Mill Playhouse has received numerous awards and national recognition for its unique and family-friendly learning experience.

"The Paper Mill Playhouse plays an instrumental role in providing essential arts-focused, educational services necessary to help those with autism and other developmental disabilities reach their potential and lead richer, fuller lives," said Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno. "I applaud their work and the efforts of all of our statewide arts organizations for their

ongoing commitment to addressing this most important and pressing cause, not only during Autism Awareness Month but throughout the entire year."

One of New Jersey's most popular and recognized arts venues, Paper Mill Playhouse has been an innovative force in creating a portfolio of programs focused squarely on the needs of the autism community. Working together with leading nonprofit organizations like VSA New Jersey and academic institutions such as Rutgers University, Paper Mill Playhouse's annual calendar has included events such as "Autism-Friendly Performances," "Stone Soup and Other Stories" gatherings, and "Theater for Everyone" creative drama classes for students with autism and other developmental disabilities. For these and other commitments to inclusive programming and access initiatives, Paper Mill has been recognized by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performance Arts and the Cultural Access Network of New Jersey, among others.

A grantee of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, an agency within the Department of State, Paper Mill Playhouse received over \$729,000 in combined general operating and arts education special initiative support in the 2014 fiscal year.

"Paper Mill Playhouse is thrilled to again welcome Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno to our campus to celebrate Autism Awareness Month, an issue near and dear to us," remarked Todd Schmidt, Managing Director of the Paper Mill Playhouse. "In New Jersey, where 1 in 45 children are diagnosed with autism, the challenge is significant. Families struggle to find non-judgmental and accommodating opportunities to enjoy live theater together. When we found no models for programming that accommodates such families, Paper Mill drew on its extensive expertise in arts education and access to develop new programs that would help address the wide spectrum of challenges these families face at a traditional live theater performance."

New Jersey is one of only four 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. To date, more than 12,400 individuals through age 21 have registered. Furthering this commitment, Governor Christie's Fiscal Year 2015 budget proposes \$135 million for the Department of Health's Early Intervention System, a critical resource for providing timely identification, evaluation and intervention services.

The Christie Administration has made addressing the needs of the autism community a foremost priority. These efforts include, but are not limited to, establishing the Office of Autism within the Department of Human Services, and creating a single point of access to care through the Children's System of Care (CSOC) within the Department of Children and Families.

To learn more about the work of the Paper Mill Playhouse, in addition to its upcoming performance schedule, visit papermill.org.

PHOTO CAPTION: Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno attends performance of the Theatre for Everyone program at Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn during Autism Awareness Month.

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Photo1 - Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno attends performance of the Theatre for Everyone program at Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn during Autism Awareness Month.

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