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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Spotlights 9th Annual World Autism Awareness Day

Friday, March 31, 2017

Tags: [First Lady](#)

Drumthwacket to Light It Up Blue on Sunday April 2



Trenton, NJ – Encouraging increased understanding and acceptance of children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), First Lady Mary Pat Christie announced today that Drumthwackett will *Light It Up Blue* to mark the 9th annual [World Autism Awareness Day](#) on Sunday, April 2. One in 41 children in the Garden State is touched by autism, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Over the past seven and a half years, the Governor and I have felt strongly about raising awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder and we have been honored to meet with the children, families, medical professionals and private organizations who represent the heart of this community,” said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. “World Autism Awareness Day is another opportunity to reinforce that commitment through empowerment, independence and ensuring that there is equal opportunity for children and adults with special needs.”

Governor Christie has signed a proclamation declaring the month of April as Autism Awareness Month in New Jersey and Sunday, April 2, 2017 as World Autism Day.

ASD represents a broad group of disorders that vary widely from mild to severe and is frequently diagnosed during the first three years of life. Most often, it is characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication, severely limited interests and repetitive behaviors.

More than 70 million people around the world are affected by ASD. The most recent data from the CDC indicates that nationally, an average of one in 68 individuals have an ASD. It is four and half times more prevalent in boys than in girls and affects families of all races, ethnicities and socio-economic groups.

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,

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diagnosing and documenting children with ASD. Governor Christie's fiscal year 2018 budget provides \$176 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, nurse practitioners and other autism providers so children can be referred for resources and services. More than 23,500 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 also is 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 \$38 million in research grants since 2008 as well as with a Center for Excellence located at Montclair State University. This past November, the Christie Administration announced \$3.2 million in grant funds for Autism Health Needs Medical Homes, focusing on care for adolescents and young adults, and advanced research in the understanding, evaluation and treatment of autism. The funding went to medical schools, universities and hospitals. In 2017, the Council's activities will focus on awarding up to \$3 million in grants to the **NJ Autism Center of Excellence Coordinating Center** (NJACE) Clinical and Translational Research Pilot Projects, Basic Science Pilot Projects on Autism and Autism Health Needs Medical Homes Pilot Projects.

Governor Christie has signed numerous pieces of legislation impacting individuals with ASD and other developmental disorders, including:

- **P.L. 2017, c.24:** Provides for voluntary contributions by taxpayers on gross income tax returns to support autism programs.
- **P.L. 2017 c.6:** Requires teacher preparation program for instructional certificate to include certain amount of instruction or clinical experience in special education and for students with disabilities endorsement to include credit hours in autism spectrum disorder.
- **P.L.2016, c.72:** Requires Department of Human Services (DHS) to develop timeline for use by individuals with developmental disabilities to gain benefit of State and federal programs; requires posting timeline on DHS, Department of Children and Families, and Department of Education websites.
- **P.L.2015, c.184:** Establishes "MVP Emergency Alert System" for missing persons with mental, intellectual, or developmental disabilities.
- **P.L.2015, c.185:** Authorizes establishment of Achieving a Better Life Experience accounts for persons with certain disabilities.
- **P.L.2014, c.10:** Provides that school districts must ensure that students with disabilities have opportunities to participate in athletic activities equal to those of other students.
- **P.L.2012, c.69:** "Tara's Law"; provides protections for individuals with developmental disabilities residing in community care residences and for investigations of abuse of individuals with developmental disabilities.
- **P.L.2011, c. 156:** Allows students with disabilities to bring service animal to school (specifically mentions autism).
- **P.L.2010, c.5:** Establishes registry of offenders of individuals with developmental disabilities in DHS.

Families looking for a centralized source of information can call on the [Office on Autism](#), which was established by Governor Christie 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.

Each year, thousands of buildings, businesses and homes across seven continents and more than 100 countries participate in the *Light It Up Blue* initiative. Famous sites this year include the CN Tower in Canada; London Eye, U.K.; Fenway Park in Boston; DOHA Tower in Qatar; Lady of Lebanon in Beirut; Empire State Building in New York; the Emirates Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth, UK; Niagara Falls; The Taipei 101 in Taipei; One World Trade Center in New York City; and Gillette Stadium, Foxboro Massachusetts.

[Governor Christie's Proclamation](#) [pdf 420kB].

PHOTO CAPTION: Drumthwacket Lights it Up Blue for Autism Awareness

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