

Governor Christie, First Lady Mary Pat Christie and Administration Officials Mark Autism Awareness Month

Tuesday April 1, 2014

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Trenton, NJ – Governor Christie and First Lady Mary Pat Christie have announced that Drumthwacket will be lit in blue tomorrow evening, Wednesday April 2 to recognize World Autism Awareness Day. In addition, Governor Christie has declared April as Autism Awareness Month in New Jersey. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a biologically-based disorder that impacts the development and functioning of a person’s verbal and non-verbal communication skills, social interactions and patterns of behavior.

“Autism affects not only those who live with the disorder, but also impacts their families, friends and communities,” said Governor Christie. “As government leaders we have a moral obligation to recognize the individual and unique needs of everyone with a developmental disability and provide the tools necessary to help them lead fuller, more productive lives. That’s why my Administration is relentless in its commitment to find new and innovative ways to support New Jersey families impacted by ASD and improving the lives of their loved ones.”

Autism is estimated to affect 1 in 45 children in New Jersey, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) recently released a report that found the rate nationally is 1 in 68. The earlier a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or developmental delay is identified and connected to services, the sooner services can be provided to ensure the child is able to reach their full potential.

“By shining a light on this important issue, we’re showing our support for New Jersey families who are experiencing the impact of ASD,” said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. “It’s also an appropriate time to highlight the innovative work being done by so many organizations in New Jersey to serve people with autism and an opportunity to promote greater understanding of this developmental disability.”

With one of the best systems in the nation for identifying, diagnosing and documenting children with autism spectrum disorders, Governor Christie’s fiscal year 2015 budget commits \$135 million for the Department of Health’s Early Intervention System, which provides 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 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. Approximately, 12,400 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. To centralize and coordinate autism-related information, the Christie Administration established the Office on Autism within the Department of Human Services Division of Developmental Disabilities in August 2010.

Through a sweeping realignment of social services programs to provide a single access point to care for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, a Children’s System of Care (CSOC) was created within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Since the creation of CSOC, more than 4,000 authorizations for services for these children were transferred to CSOC and more than 1,500 new family support services were authorized.

In addition to the coordinated family services already provided, another component to the Governor’s Medicaid Reform plan will be phased in this year to increase CSOC’s ability to meet the needs of this autism community. Through the Autism Spectrum Disorder Pilot Program, up to 200 children will receive services, including applied behavior analysis and supports.

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New Jersey is also at the forefront of supporting autism research through the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism, which has provided nearly \$25 million in research grants since 2008, as well as with a Center for Excellence located at Montclair State University.

Throughout the month of April, members of the Christie Administration, including First Lady Mary Pat Christie, Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno, Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd, Human Services Commissioner Jennifer Velez and Children and Families Commissioner Allison Blake will showcase the work being done by individuals and organizations in New Jersey to serve people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

Today, staff from six state agencies (Community Affairs, Children and Families, Education, Health, Human Service and Labor) will participate in the worldwide Bubbles4Autism on the steps of the Statehouse in Trenton to increase autism awareness; On April 9, Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd will speak at the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism Conference at Montclair State University; On April 16, Human Services officials will visit Baker's Treats in Flemington; On April 22, First Lady Mary Pat Christie will honor Cathy Carisi of Camp Acorn in Allendale for her work with children and young adults with multiple disabilities, including autism. Additionally, the Department of Human Services' Office on Autism will release an updated version of its Family Guide, "Navigating Through the Maze" with new and existing programs and services available statewide for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their families.

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