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Autism National Committee, Inc.

23 years of advocacy for children and adults with autism

www.autcom.org

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October 28, 2013

The Honorable Robert Menendez, Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6225

The Honorable Bob Corker, Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6225

***Re: Ratification of the CRPD; Enable People with Autism and Other Disabilities
Worldwide to Have Protections like the Americans with Disabilities Act***

Dear Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Corker:

The Autism National Committee (AutCom) writes to share our strong support for ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and to thank you for scheduling hearings on this important treaty. AutCom is a 23-year-old national nonprofit organization of people with autism, advocates, and other professionals dedicated to protecting and advancing the human rights and civil rights of adults and children with Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and related differences of communication and behavior.

Ratifying the CRPD is very important for the world's 1 billion people with disabilities, 80% of whom live in developing countries. By ratifying the treaty, America will be able to lead the rest of the world to adopt legislation and policies that embrace the rights and dignity of all people with disabilities, just as we have in the United States. The CRPD was modeled on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and its role in empowering people with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society. Ratifying the CRPD will enable America to provide leadership in bringing the rest of the world up to ADA Standards. It will enable us to encourage other countries to fight disability discrimination, provide greater civic and political participation, self-sufficiency, and independent living for people with disabilities.

The CRPD will protect Americans with disabilities who work and travel abroad. Approximately 4 out of 10 American travelers are people with disabilities and their companions. Yet, they face constant barriers and discrimination abroad. By ratifying the CRPD, the U.S. will offer decades of honed technical expertise to reduce barriers globally and ensure that Americans who travel and study abroad have the same access they enjoy here. This will help American businesses grow.

The CRPD will not cost the United States any extra money. The United States will not need to change its laws. We will continue to follow the laws we have about disabilities and other issues at the federal and state levels. Education, homeschooling, and parental rights will remain a matter of state law--the treaty will not change those rights at all.

Autism is found throughout the world in people of all racial, ethnic and social backgrounds. Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD) are disabilities characterized by qualitative differences in the development of cognitive, language, social or motor skills. Through the ADA and supports, people with autism in the United States live successful, integrated lives. They go to work; they attend school; they contribute to their families and their communities. But many foreign countries do not recognize the existence of autism. In those countries, people with autism may get no supports. They may be wrongly diagnosed with disorders they do not have. They may be assumed incapable of learning. They may be institutionalized, kept away from their families and communities. They may be ostracized. They may be neglected and abused. Ratifying the CRPD will enable the United States to build awareness of autism overseas, and to ensure that people with autism are integrated in society. Being part of the CRPD process will enable America to help build a vital international framework to protect the human rights of people with autism and other disabilities.

We thank the Committee for holding hearings on the CRPD and we urge the Senate to ratify the treaty soon thereafter. Ratifying this critical treaty will help protect the human rights of all people with disabilities and ensure the equality that is the heart of the American dream.

Sincerely,

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