

## **Augmentative and Alternative Communication Centers to Establish National Training (AACCENT) Act Summary**

Communication is a basic human need and right and is essential for social inclusion, self-determination, and emotional and physical well-being. Unfortunately, for those with expressive communication barriers, we do not have resources and information readily available to provide them with proper supports. This leads to a risk of unemployment, limited education, poverty, and low quality of life. More than 4 million people in the United States cannot reliably meet their daily communication needs using verbal speech. <sup>1</sup>

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is any tool, system, device, strategy, or other support that can be used to replace or supplement spoken and/or written words. AAC can be no-tech (ex. gestures), low-tech (ex. Velcro communication boards), or high-tech (ex. speech-generating devices). Advances in AAC have enhanced communication and improved outcomes for millions of Americans, yet, access to AAC is limited. There are currently no national resource centers for AAC, even though knowledge about AAC and access to AAC is rare.

The Augmentative and Alternative Communication Centers to Establish National Training (AACCENT) Act will soon be reintroduced by Senator Casey (D-PA) along with six other co-sponsors. The Autism Society supports this legislation. An identical bill has not yet been introduced in the House. This bill will help reduce these barriers by establishing three national resource centers coordinated to improve access to AAC information, tools, and supports for AAC users and their families. The centers will also aim to increase the leadership skills of AAC users, their families, and professionals. They will collaborate with partner organizations, be guided by an advisory council of individuals who face communication barriers, and will have to provide an annual report to Congress. More specifically the centers will:

- Increase access and implementation of all types of AAC

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<sup>1</sup> Beukelman DR, Mirenda P. Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs. 4th ed. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.; 2013.



- Disseminate evidence-based resources, trainings, technical assistance, and practices to ensure individuals can exhibit self-determination to engage in their communities
- Increase public awareness and knowledge about the importance of, need for, benefits of, and rights to meaningful access to effective communication tools and other supports in all aspects of community and life

### **Autism Society of America**

The Autism Society's mission is to create connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources needed to live fully. As the nation's oldest leading grassroots Autism organization, the Autism Society and its approximately 70+ local affiliates serve over half a million members of the Autism community each year. It envisions a world where everyone in the Autism community is connected to the support they need, when they need it – including education, advocacy efforts, and supports and services throughout their lifespan.