

May 14, 2025

Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D.

Senator Bernie Sanders

Chair, United States Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Ranking Member, United States Senate
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions

Submitted Via email

RE: May 14, 2025, Hearing on Fiscal Year 2026 Department of Health and Human Services Budget

Chair Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Autism Society of America, the nation's oldest and largest grassroots Autism organization, we respectfully submit this statement for the record regarding the Department of Health and Human Services' Fiscal Year 2026 budget request.

We thank the Committee for its ongoing commitment to public health, science-based policymaking, and equitable access to services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As an organization dedicated to creating connections and empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources they need to live fully, we are acutely aware of how federal health policy and funding shape the lives of over 5 million adults and 1 in 31 children in the U.S. living with Autism.

1. Support for Robust FY26 Funding for HHS Autism Programs

We urge the Committee to support and enhance funding in the FY26 budget for critical HHS programs that serve the Autism community, including:

- Protect the **Autism CARES Act** programs administered by the **National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Health Research and Services Administration's (HRSA) workforce training**. Ensure the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee is reestablished and guides the work of HHS in Autism policy.
- Expanded investments in **community-based services, early diagnosis, and interdisciplinary training programs** and protect the **Administration for Community Living (ACL)**.

- Evidence-based research support through the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)**, including the **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)** and **National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)**.
- Protect federal Medicaid funding which enables many with Autism to receive services in their community, to enable them to be contributing members to their community.

Stable and increased funding is critical to expanding access to services, reducing disparities in diagnosis and care, and ensuring a strong provider workforce to meet growing demand.

2. Statement on Causation Misinformation and Vaccine Safety

As this Committee considers testimony and commentary from Secretary Kennedy, we strongly urge a clear distinction between evidence-based science and misinformation. Claims that definitive environmental exposures, parenting styles, or vaccines cause Autism not only lack scientific evidence but are incredibly irresponsible. Vaccine causation has been thoroughly discredited by decades of rigorous scientific research involving millions of children worldwide. These unfounded assertions have not only been debunked by the **CDC**, **NIH**, and the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, but they have also contributed to dangerous declines in vaccination rates and the resurgence of deadly preventable diseases.

The Autism Society of America unequivocally supports the scientific consensus on vaccine safety and urges all leaders to refrain from perpetuating harmful myths that erode public trust and stigmatize individuals with Autism. The focus must be on ensuring that all research efforts are led by credentialed, evidence-based experts who understand the complexities of Autism and are committed to advancing scientifically valid findings. This includes safeguarding transparency and accountability throughout the process to ensure that research is conducted in a manner that is ethical, inclusive, and grounded in science. Rigorous, peer-reviewed, and analyzed science takes time, funding, and a significant investment of capital – claiming that this can be achieved in incredibly short time frames is misleading and threatens the public's health and decision-making.

3. Commitment to Integrity, Equity and Dignity

The Autism Society envisions a future where all Autistic individuals have equitable access to healthcare, education, employment, and community living. We urge the Committee to ensure that the FY26 budget reflects a genuine commitment to disability equity and that Autistic voices are meaningfully included in policymaking and testimony processes that affect our lives.

Public policy and discourse must recognize the inherent value, rights, and diverse needs of Autistic people. Scientific consensus does not support claims that Autism is "preventable"—such language fosters harmful stigma rather than understanding. Similarly, referring to Autism as a



"chronic disease," a "childhood disease," or an "epidemic" misrepresents the Autistic experience and undermines respect and inclusion.

4. Upholding Ethical Data Privacy and Consent

We also express concern about the increasing use of registries and large-scale data collection efforts. Any such initiatives must prioritize choice, meaning explicit informed consent, transparency, and robust protections for privacy and data security from the outset.

Building trust with the Autistic community must be a central priority—anchored in transparency, accountability, and strong privacy safeguards at every stage of research and policy development. Currently, that trust is fractured, and is fueling fear, confusion and misinformation among the Autism community. In moments when rhetoric or internal disagreement risks division, it is essential to hold space for diverse perspectives and lived experiences. At our core, we share a common goal: to ensure that Autistic individuals and their families have meaningful, equitable access to the resources, supports, and services they need to thrive.

We thank the Committee for its leadership in oversight and urge a continued bipartisan focus on supporting the health, well-being, and dignity of all Americans, including individuals with Autism and their families.

Respectfully submitted,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christopher S. Banks". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a thin black rectangular border.

Christopher S. Banks, President and CEO of the Autism Society