

## APRC Progress Announcement 2016

**The Autism Policy Reform Coalition** (APRC) has been steadily working on behalf of its constituent organizations to encourage enactment of a national policy that will have a positive effect on autism's prevalence, severity, and its impact on both those who live with it and the society at large.

As we move into 2017, we thought it would be a good time to announce some of the achievements and advances in national autism policy that APRC was instrumental in bringing about.

It's no secret that APRC has been highly critical of national autism policy as legislated by the Combating Autism Act of 2006, and later only slightly altered by the Autism CARES Act of 2014. Among other things, we are concerned about the composition and lack of efficacy of The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC). Despite the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) Strategic Plan, the science research on environmental factors has been consistently underfunded by IACC to the tune of \$30 million a year. Every year the vast majority of spending on scientific research has gone into genetic studies, which have failed to yield any conclusions regarding genetics as a singular cause. Rather, the results have indicated that the autism spectrum is likely due to a complex interplay between genetic predispositions and environmental exposures. What remains a significant concern is that these studies continue to be funded as they are rather than focus on the true cause.

One of APRC's major goals has been to ensure funding for more environmental causation research, and in 2016, we made major strides in that direction. We were able to convince the Senate Appropriations Committee to include language in their report accompanying the Appropriations Bill encouraging the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to study environmental factors in autism causation, particularly with respect to regressive autism, and an additional \$29 million was added to NIEHS's budget. We have had discussions with NIEHS in an effort to influence the types of projects that are funded with this money, and we encouraged the members of our constituent organizations to send their suggestions and concerns to Linda Birnbaum, Director of NIEHS. We have had some major impact in key areas, some of which we have reported and others will be revealed at a later date.

We are delighted to be able to report that for 2017, the Senate Appropriations Committee Report includes language directing the NIEHS, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), to perform research that the APRC regards as important for meeting a major goal. Specific language can be found in the Letter from the APRC President and in the Report itself.

Crafting effective national policy is not accomplished overnight, and creating the kind of change we wish to see takes long-term sustained effort. We hope that all our hard work at APRC to date will pay off with even more accomplishments to report by the end of 2017!

We have been very grateful to receive the majority of our funding for 2016 from Barry Segal of Focus for Health Foundation. If you'd like to help us carry out this important mission, please consider making a contribution to help defray our operating costs.