



The Autism Center

MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES for CHILDREN

Championing laws, policies & rights for children with autism

SUCCESSES

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This year has been another year of steady progress in the fight for the rights of children and young adults with autism in Massachusetts. Please see pages 2 & 3 for more information on our progress in these key areas:

Expanding services thru implementing the Autism Omnibus Bill

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Assisting low-income parents

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Supporting Spanish-speaking parents

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Accessing technology

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Creating paths to college

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Providing transition to young adulthood

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Training parents & professionals

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When Emmanuel's mother called in distress...page 2.



Advancing the Cause

Since 2002, the Autism Center of the Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC) has been a pioneering voice in autism advocacy. Working with Massachusetts elected officials & partners, the Center has helped create laws that ensure access to services for children and young adults with autism. But more work is needed. With this newsletter, we invite you to work along with us. To learn more, visit us on the web at www.massadvocates.org/autism.

With your help...

Your support and involvement makes our progress possible. Advocacy takes resources and many voices. Every donation, every email you send your legislator, every new Friend of the Autism Center strengthens our voice. Thank you!





When Emmanuel's mother called in distress..

Emmanuel* is a 13-year-old student with autism. According to his school, Emmanuel was not a learner. He tested at low to average intelligence. But at home he read at a college level and was a computer whiz.

In Emmanuel's case, we got involved. With MAC's advocacy, the school paid for a clinical evaluation. According to the results Emmanuel had a high IQ but needed extra support. With those results in hand, MAC advocated successfully for the extra services he needed to succeed. Today Emmanuel is flourishing and looks forward to going to college to study computers.

MAC offers a free Helpline to all Massachusetts parents, providing information, referrals, and extra assistance to low income parents as capacity allows.

* This is a true story, name & photo are changed for privacy.

The Autism Omnibus Law

A year ago we were celebrating the passage of the landmark Autism Omnibus Law. Together with our partners, we had advocated for this bill, which addressed many unmet needs of individuals and students with autism. The law required that state Medicaid health insurance cover treatment for children with autism. It expanded eligibility for state services for adults with autism, increased training opportunities for teachers, created a tax-free savings account for individuals with autism and other disabilities and established a permanent Autism Commission.

That was just the beginning. Implementation of laws requires steady, multi-year advocacy and education so the law is understood. Throughout 2015, we have worked with legislators & officials to expedite implementation of the Omnibus bill's key components. MassHealth now covers applied behavior analysis services (ABA), as well as medically necessary communication devices such as tablets for children with autism under the age of 21. We've provided training materials on our website to help parents get the full range of new Omnibus Law services for their children.

Soon, teachers will be able to receive an endorsement in Autism Spectrum Disorder, so more Massachusetts children will receive appropriate academic support.



In conjunction with Lesley University, MAC has been leading a working group to draft recommended regulations and guidelines for the Department of Education to consider as they formalize this ASD teacher endorsement.

MAC also has provided workshops across the state and hosted a webinar explaining new services covered under the Autism Omnibus Bill, and how to obtain them.

MAC's Helpline
617-357-8431 Ext. 224

Listen online to learn more: Autism Omnibus Webinar
<http://massadvocates.org/autism-omnibus-law-webinar/>

2015 Accomplishments

MAC's Autism Center works in three important spheres: providing individual Helpline and case advocacy support, empowering parents and educators through training programs, and advocating for passage and implementation of major legislation.

This year, we provided legal assistance and advice to **over 330 parents** experiencing difficulty obtaining necessary special education services for their children with autism, with almost a quarter of these parents from Latino and other immigrant communities. And we provided intensive legal technical assistance to **74 children with ASD** whose families called the Center's helpline, with almost 50% of the families from Latino, Haitian, Asian, African, and other immigrant communities.

We trained **over 400 parents** of children with autism and **more than 360 medical professionals and educators** regarding relevant ASD and special education laws and procedures.

Here's a glance at just some of **this year's advocacy highlights**:

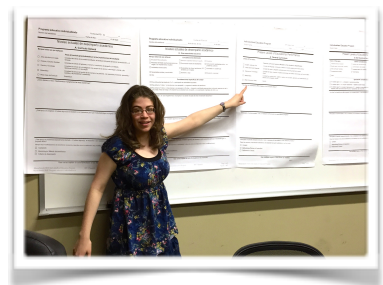
- \$137 million in the state budget to implement **new state Medicaid coverage of ABA** services for children with autism. Through working in close collaboration with other advocacy organizations, children with ASD from low-income families now have coverage equivalent to children covered by private insurance.
- Implementation of the new Massachusetts law requiring state **Medicaid coverage of Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)** devices and software, including tablets such as iPads. Advocating with other partner organizations, the state agreed to expand coverage of AAC devices for adults as well as children.
- Launched a new initiative, **Proyecto Acceso a la Educación Especial**, with a Spanish-speaking attorney dedicated to providing outreach, training, and legal assistance in Spanish to parents of children with autism and other disabilities who are limited English proficient.
- Coordination of the Boston Workforce Development Taskforce and the release of an action plan of its Boston Special Education Transition (B-SET) project to provide opportunities for Boston students with autism and other disabilities to more fully integrate into the mainstream of career and workforce development opportunities. Learn more at <http://b-setforcareer.org/>
- Approval of \$1.2 million in state funding for the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (ICEI), passed with MAC's help in 2007 to increase access to higher education for older youth with ASD and ID. More students who are unable to graduate from high school can attend state colleges.

For additional information about our other 2015 advocacy, visit our website: www.massadvocates.org/autism.

Learning to be a Self - Advocate

Meet Val, Our Fellow

My name is Valerie MacIver and I am autistic. Each day at MAC is an amazing experience. On some days, I attend a meeting or a lecture at the State House, write an essay on my experience, and make phone calls to representatives regarding budget concerns. I have



presented about transition at different trainings with different staff from MAC. During my presentation at the Federation for Children with Special Needs, I told my story about being bullied. In addition, I'm learning how to work in an office setting.

MAC is helping me to prepare for a future career, discover ways to branch out, stretch my comfort zone, and find out more about who I am as a person on the autism spectrum.

The Autism Center's **Young Adult Leader Fellows with ASD** develop critically important advocacy and employment skills.

Join with Us



We helped launch the Friends of the Autism Center in 2014 because we saw the tremendous value of MAC's advocacy for students with autism and knew that much more remains to be accomplished. We also know how valuable it is for parents of children with autism to network with other parents and professionals. We hope you will consider joining us and look forward to seeing you at our next event.

Ann Guay & Susan Senator
Co-Chairs
Friends of the Autism Center

Become a Friend of the Autism Center

Online at:
www.massadvocates.org/friend

Or donate by mail:

MAC Autism Center
 25 Kingston Street, 2nd Floor
 Boston, MA 02111

Massachusetts
 Legal
 Assistance
 Corporation



The Friends of the Autism Center

The **Friends of the Autism Center** provide critical financial support of **The Autism Center's** advocacy. By becoming a Friend, you join a powerful network of Massachusetts parents and professionals committed to ensuring that children and young adults with autism have access to the educational services they need in order to achieve their potential. Friends sponsor forums & social events at least two times per year.

Where your voice matters. Friends of the Autism Center represent many perspectives. We share ideas, collaborate, support one another, and help advance opportunities for children and young adults with autism.



Hold the Date for Our Next Event: March 9, 2016, 5:30 pm

Spring Networking Event Featuring Rosalind Picard: Founder of the Affective Computing Research Group at the MIT Media Lab.

Where: Microsoft New England Research & Development Center (NERD Center) in Cambridge, MA. Visit our website for updates.

The Autism Center is led by Julia Landau, Esq., Director



A nationally noted expert in special education law, Ms. Landau has represented parents of children with disabilities for over 30 years. She is a recognized leader in state policy regarding students with autism spectrum disorder.