



The Autism Center

MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES for CHILDREN

Championing laws, policies and rights
for children with autism.

With your support, the Autism Center brightens futures for students by advocating for individual children and improving systemic policy. Your gift changes lives...

MAC's advocacy gave a voice to Thomas and hope to his mom*

Thomas' journey from tantrums to communication. Thomas is an active 6-year-old child with Autism, who loves music and drumming, just like his older sister. His parents, who speak Spanish, are from the Dominican Republic. Thomas' parents knew he had potential that the district was not recognizing, but did not know where to begin.



When the case came to MAC, Thomas was nonverbal – he only knew how to communicate by pointing or pulling a person's hand to indicate what he wanted. Thomas had frequent tantrums, in part because he was unable to communicate. During his first two years in school, critical years for the development of language skills, Thomas was placed in an inappropriate classroom, with minimal services to address his autism.

From the heart of a parent..

"I noticed a tremendous change in Thomas's communication skills [since MAC became involved in our case]. He is more focused, imitating a lot more words, and he is improving on his self-help skills and social skills. With MAC's support, I feel less tension and more confidence to discuss my child's needs in an IEP meeting... You are a blessing to us!"

- Thomas' mom

With help from MAC's Autism Center advocacy, over the past year, Thomas has received the specialized services vital to his development, including behavioral therapy. Thomas also receives in home behavioral services through MassHealth, services now available because of MAC's legislative advocacy.

MAC helped Thomas obtain a communication device, which he is learning to use in the classroom and at home. Thomas and his teachers, parents and providers are receiving training from assistive technology experts to ensure he can use his new device effectively. He is starting to communicate with his teachers, family members, and peers. In the future, other students in Thomas' district who may also need assistive technology to communicate will also benefit from MAC's advocacy for Thomas.

MAC's 2016 Impact*



1,235 Calls - up 25%
Our Helpline staff & volunteers empowered families to advocate for their children.



61 Cases
MAC represented low income children in 2016 to help them get access to services they needed to achieve.



5 Priorities
We advanced equal access to education children at the statehouse and in Boston Public Schools in five priority areas.

* Name changed to protect privacy.

*12 mos. ending 12/1/16

Autism Center's 2016 Annual Accomplishments for Children with Autism

- Provided **legal assistance and advice to 425 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.
- Provided **legal representation and intensive legal technical assistance to 56** children with autism whose families called the Center's helpline, with almost 40% of the families from Latino, Haitian, Asian, African, and other immigrant communities.
- Provided **specialized workshops for approximately 1000 parents, medical professionals, and educators**, training significantly higher numbers this year with the new curriculum focused on the Autism Omnibus Act.
- Launched two new **Autism Center webinars**, reaching more families and professionals who are unable to attend live workshops with over **200 people** registered.
- Led a campaign leading to enactment of a **new law requiring state Medicaid coverage of non-dedicated AAC devices and software, including tablets such as iPads**, directly addressing the state's refusal to implement the provisions of the Autism Omnibus Act.
- Led advocacy efforts with the state Office of Medicaid to fully implement coverage of ABA services, with **900 children receiving ABA services** in the first nine months, working closely with the Autism Insurance Resource Center (AIRC), Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI), and other autism organizations.
- Released the landmark study and action plan of the Boston Special Education Transition (B-SET) Workforce Development Taskforce, and led efforts to implement the comprehensive recommendations with **the newly formed B-SET for Career Network**, composed of nearly 60 organizations, including disability and youth agencies, employers, the Boston Public Schools, workforce development agencies, and state agencies.
- Addressed transition needs of students with autism through advocacy efforts resulting in a funding increase and final appropriation of **\$1.4 million to increase access to higher education** for older youth with autism and Intellectual Disabilities (ID). This initiative now supports **16 colleges and universities** (more than half of the 29 public institution of higher education in Massachusetts) and **59 school districts** that included over **250 students** this year.
- Advocated effectively for state regulations and guidance providing **comprehensive competencies for the new state Autism Endorsement** for special education teachers to help increase school district capacity to meet the complex needs of students with autism.
- Successfully advocated for a **new state policy** addressing provision of **high quality transition services needed to improve post-secondary outcomes** emphasizing the importance of providing community-based services on job, college, and other sites.
- Provided additional workshops and advocacy support to **Parents Concerned for Children with Autism in Lawrence**, and as a result the district established inclusion as the primary overarching goal for its new five year strategic plan, with a commitment from the receiver to hire inclusion experts needed to address the segregation of children with autism.
- The Autism Center **successfully supported a Young Adult Leader Fellow with autism** to develop critically important advocacy and employment skills. The Fellow provided youth, parents, educators, and legislators with vital information about the potential of individuals with autism, and she developed a series of online videos focused on self-advocacy for youth, families, and professionals: <http://massadvocates.org/youngadultleadersfellowship/>

Brighten a child's future.

A gift in any amount to the Friends of the Autism Center helps us give children hope.

Become a member with a gift of \$250 or more.

www.massadvocates.org/friends

All donations are tax deductible.



Massachusetts Advocates for Children
25 Kingston Street, 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02111
617-357-8431



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