



DD/Autism 2012 Task Force Report

In 2012, the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Task Forces merged and met on an ad-hoc basis. Given that the two task forces work on the same issues, it will likely continue to work together or just merge into the Developmental Disabilities Task Force.

The Task Force continued to work with the Rights Task Force to educate members of Congress about H.R. 2032. Introduced by Representative Frank (D-MA) in May 2011, this bill would restrict the ability of protection and advocacy systems to bring class action lawsuits that would enforce the rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in institutions. The Task Force is pleased to report that this bill has been stopped from moving forward in the 112th Congress. However, despite Representative Frank's retirement this year, there is still the possibility that the bill will be reintroduced by a current co-sponsor or new member of the House. The DD Task Force will continue to work with the Rights Task Force to prevent reintroduction by meeting with members of the House.

Having accomplished the reauthorization of the Combating Autism Reauthorization Act in the previous year, the Task Force monitored its implementation and worked with appropriators to ensure that the law was fully funded. Given that the Combating Autism Reauthorization Act was only reauthorized for three years (to 2014) and still has a sunset provision, the CCD will have to begin work in reauthorizing the law again soon.

The Task Force also monitored bills to provide additional services to youth and adults with autism. The most recent activity has been related to insurance coverage for behavioral health treatment for dependents of military personnel. In the House of Representatives, John Larson (D-CT) offered an amendment to the House Defense authorization bill that was approved. The amendment, which includes the major components of the Caring for Military Kids with Autism Act (H.R. 2288), mandates coverage under TRICARE, the military's health care program, to include behavioral health treatments for autism, including applied behavioral analysis (ABA). It also removes the insurance cap on ABA.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) offered a similar amendment in the Senate during committee markup. CCD worked successfully with Sens. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Gillibrand to change the amendment to require such coverage for all children with developmental disabilities when prescribed by a physician. Research has shown that applied behavioral analysis (ABA), in particular, is effective in reducing self-injurious behaviors in people with the most significant disabilities. Unfortunately, during the conference committee, the conferees ceded to the House bill that included treatment, including ABA, for those on the autism spectrum only. The National Defense Reauthorization Act was passed by the House and Senate the week of Dec. 20.