



January 8, 2016

The Autism Policy Reform Coalition is pleased to announce that our work in Washington, D.C. resulted in a significant shift in the direction of federal autism research efforts.

The U. S. Senate Appropriations Committee Report accompanying the 2016 Appropriations Bill funding the National Institute of Environmental Health Science (NIEHS) included the following language: “The Committee urges NIEHS to enhance its support for research, including experimental and observational research, on potential environmental risk factors that may play a role in the initiation or promotion of ASD at any life stage. Further, with respect to regressive autism, NIEHS is encouraged to focus research on the susceptibility of subpopulations to environmental risk factors and consider approaches to the mitigation of environmental risks associated with ASD.”

This language marks a significant policy change in autism research, away from the genetic and psychiatric approaches which have consumed nearly all federal research dollars on autism. The Report acknowledges “regressive autism”, heralding a genuine paradigm shift.

Furthermore, the Senate Appropriations Committee recommended a budget plus-up for NIEHS of \$28million over the 2015 level – the amount APRC informed the Committee that NIH has underfunded environmental causation according to the Strategic Plan for Autism Research. The final appropriation for fiscal 2016 resulted in a \$26 million increase.

APRC is enormously grateful for the work of Congressional leaders involved in creating this policy breakthrough. But continued advocacy is essential to enable the NIEHS to fulfill this new policy mandate. In particular, the NIEHS should promptly and faithfully execute on this mandate through more focused funding mechanisms than investigator-initiated research proposals, such as program announcements and special emphasis panels. Such mechanisms will be essential to answer questions about the role of environmental factors in ASD.

We anticipate that interested scientists will have new opportunities over the next nine months to secure funding for long needed research on the role of environmental factors in autism. Because time will be short when the funds become available, we hope the scientific community will begin to maximize the benefit these additional resources can create on our ability to understand, prevent and/or ameliorate the hardships of those facing autism.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Kette", written in a cursive style.

Stephen D. Kette
President, Autism Policy Reform Coalition