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BARACK OBAMA AND JOE BIDEN: SUPPORTING AMERICANS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

More than one million Americans have Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), a complex condition that impacts communication, socialization, and behavior. And more cases of ASD are being recognized across the country at an alarming pace. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that we must do more to help support Americans with ASD, their families, and their communities. Throughout his career, Barack Obama has worked with families affected by ASD to raise awareness and to provide support to parents and families living with ASD. As president, he will build on these many years of advocacy and ensure that his administration prioritizes ASD research, public awareness, and lifelong support services. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will seek to increase federal ASD funding for research, treatment, screenings, public awareness, and support services to \$1 billion annually by the end of his first term in office. They will mandate insurance coverage of autism treatment and will also continue to work with parents, physicians, providers, researchers, and schools to create opportunities and effective solutions for people with ASD.

Record of Leadership on ASD Research and Care: As an Illinois state senator, Barack Obama sponsored legislation that became law to create an ASD diagnosis education program, an initiative designed to promote the implementation of evidence-based practices. The goal of the project is to offer educational opportunities at all levels of care, including physicians, early intervention (EI) specialists, psychologists, teachers, day care providers, parents, respite workers, and speech and language therapists. Obama has personally worked side-by-side with Illinois families affected by ASD to support efforts to build the Therapeutic School and Center for Autism Research. This school and research center will bring together education, academic research, early intervention programs, and training to prepare its students for independent living.

In the U.S. Senate, Obama is a cosponsor of a measure that would expand federal funding for life-long services for people with ASD, authorizing approximately \$350 million in new federal funding for key programs related to treatments, interventions and services for both children and adults with ASD.

Appoint Federal ASD Coordinator to Oversee All Federal ASD Efforts: Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure all federal ASD activities occur in an efficient manner that prioritizes both research and supports for families affected by ASD. They will appoint a Federal ASD Coordinator to oversee federal ASD research and federal efforts to improve awareness of ASD and improve the training of medical professionals to identify and treat ASD. By establishing one top-level point person to coordinate ASD efforts in the White House, they will ensure that ASD receives the recognition and priority it deserves in the federal government. The Federal ASD Coordinator will also be tasked with eliminating bureaucratic obstacles that may be delaying implementation of important ASD measures and ensuring that all federal ASD dollars are being spent in a manner that prioritizes results. The Coordinator will work with state task forces on ASD to ensure effective communication and collaboration among federal, state, and local agencies.

Fully Fund the Combating Autism Act and Federal Autism Research Initiatives: Barack Obama supported the Combating Autism Act of 2006, which was signed into law in December 2006. The Combating Autism Act authorizes increased federal funding for ASD research and efforts to boost public awareness and early diagnosis of ASD. Since the bill has been enacted, however, federal funding for ASD has not increased to the levels authorized by the Combating Autism Act. As a U.S. Senator, Obama has worked to fully fund the Combating

Autism Act and as president, he will ensure that his administration addresses the growing impact of ASD and other special needs on American families. President Obama will fully fund the Combating Autism Act, which provides nearly \$1 billion in autism-related funding over 5 years, and work with Congress, parents and ASD experts to determine how to further improve federal and state programs.

Support Special Needs Education for Children with ASD: Barack Obama and Joe Biden understand that children with special needs – students with visual, hearing, physical, sensory, and mental impairments – require meaningful resources to succeed both inside and outside the classroom. Obama is a strong supporter of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and supports full federal funding of the law to truly ensure that no child is left behind. The current underfunding of IDEA causes school districts throughout the country to deny necessary services to students with ASD and other special needs. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also work to change IDEA’s definition of “autism” to Autism Spectrum Disorders to ensure that all children diagnosed with ASD disorders receive the support they need.

Support Universal Screening: While roughly 90 percent of infants in the United States are currently screened for various potentially disabling or life-threatening conditions, fewer than half the states screen all infants for the full recommended panel of 29 disorders. Many of these conditions, if caught early, can be treated before they result in permanent impairments or even death. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we should screen all infants, and also that we must set a national goal to provide re-screening for all two-year-olds, the age at which some conditions, including ASD, begin to appear. These screenings will be safe and secure, and available for every American that wants them. Part of the Obama-Biden early childhood intervention plan will be directed at coordinating fragmented community programs to help provide all children access to screening for disabilities as infants and again as two-year olds. Achieving universal screening is essential so that disabilities can be identified early enough for those children and families to get the special supports and resources they need.

Work Together: As part of their commitment to open the doors of our government to the American people, Barack Obama and Joe Biden are committed to facilitating open dialogue among Americans with special needs and their families, federal and state agencies, regional centers, resource centers, research institutions, school districts, first responders, and community members.

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