



September 11, 2009

The Honorable John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cornyn:

I am writing on behalf of Autism Speaks to convey our enthusiastic support for the Federal Research Public Access Act (S. 1373). Its passage will greatly benefit the autism community as well as all Americans by accelerating the pace of discovery, advancing public understanding of science and medicine, and enhancing the return on our nation's large financial investment in research.

Autism Speaks is the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments, and a cure for autism and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. We believe that it is possible to accelerate the pace of discovery, and that broad-scale open sharing of scientific research is both urgently needed and entirely practical in the Internet age. Indeed, we have recently instituted a policy under which Autism Speaks grantees are required to make their research available in the National Institutes of Health's heavily used PubMed Central open online archive. We are the first U.S.-based non-profit advocacy organization to institute such a public access requirement.

Families with autism are continually seeking new and reliable information to educate themselves about autism spectrum disorders. They are sophisticated in their ability to read and interpret scientific literature pertaining to autism. But for too long they have had access to everything except the highest quality information, which is found in peer-reviewed scientific literature. This makes little common sense, and has created much confusion in our community about what data is scientifically sound. Our new policy now allows all potential users—scientists, clinicians, businesses, educators and students, and the public alike—finally to have first-hand access to complete articles that in the past may have been available only through expensive fee-based journals.

That said, implementation of the Autism Speak policy is not enough. We strongly support a US Government-wide public access policy because science today is increasingly interdisciplinary, with significant discoveries usually drawing on knowledge from multiple fields and diverse sources. Autism Speaks strongly believes that scientific communication in the 21st Century must open the door to better integration of research and data and the application of computing and network technologies to identify patterns across disparate, high-quality information sources. A federal public access requirement is a valuable step toward addressing that need.

Passage of your bill will make it easier for scientists worldwide to better and more rapidly address the complex scientific challenges we face today. It effectively balances the needs of all stakeholders while creating a level playing field where all potential users can access and use the results of publicly funded research.

We commend your vision and leadership in sponsoring this vital legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sophia Colamarino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sophia" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Colamarino".

Sophia Colamarino, Ph.D.
Vice President, Research
Autism Speaks