

Dear DISES members,

On April 18, 2025, CEC's Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) posted the following statement regarding HHS Secretary Kennedy's comments on autism. DISES supports DADD's statement and we wanted to share the statement with you.

### **DADD's Statement on Autism**

"Yesterday's comments from HHS Secretary Kennedy are deeply disappointing, profoundly damaging, and unacceptable. The suggestion that autism is a "preventable" condition, particularly when tied to vague claims about environmental toxins without credible scientific evidence, perpetuates harmful myths that the autistic community has been combatting for decades. Let us be clear: Autism is not a disease to be eradicated. It is a natural part of human diversity. Framing it otherwise fuels dangerous misinformation, revives anti-vaccine rhetoric, and misdirects public attention and funding away from the actual priorities of autistic people and their families, like access to inclusive education, healthcare, community support, and meaningful research.

Worse still, portraying autism as a personal or societal tragedy strips autistic people of their dignity. Implying that autistic individuals are incapable of joy, connection, contribution, or fulfillment is not only wrong, but also dehumanizing. Millions of autistic people lead rich, complex, vibrant lives, and they deserve respect, not pity or fear.

The Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) stands in solidarity with the autistic community and all who are calling out this harmful narrative. We remain committed to supporting research that reflects the full diversity of the autism spectrum and to championing policies that uplift autistic voices, experiences, and rights.

We urge Secretary Kennedy to reconsider his remarks, to listen directly to autistic individuals and their families, and to engage with experts who can offer a more accurate, respectful, and humane understanding of autism. We would welcome the opportunity to be part of that conversation, and to help steer this dialogue toward a future rooted in inclusion, science, and dignity for all.

"She had this extraordinary capacity to turn her anger into positive action," said Tim Shriver Sr., reflecting on his mother, Eunice Kennedy Shriver's tireless advocacy for people with disabilities. Inspired by her legacy, DADD remains committed to carrying forward her vision, transforming challenges into opportunities and passion into progress. With steadfast dedication, we honor her wise actions, and with hope and determination, we declare: there is more to come from DADD to support our members and community."

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**The Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES)**

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