

Two autism advocates who let their voices be heard at last year's Smart Cookie Day are Wesley and Michelle Mathew.



**Autism Delaware Smart Cookie Day
Personal stories and gratitude
highlight annual advocates' appeal**

March 20, 2018—Newark DE Known as Smart Cookie Day, Autism Delaware's annual visit to Legislative Hall in Dover offers autism advocates the opportunity to share their personal stories with their elected representatives, hand-deliver cookies in gratitude for past support, and appeal for new legislation designed to improve life for Delawareans on the autism spectrum.

During this year's Smart Cookie Day on April 19, three pieces of Delaware legislation will be highlighted: House Bill (HB) 292, HB104, and HB12:

HB292 provides a much-needed expansion of resources to teachers supporting students with autism. In 1991, there were 152 students with an educational classification of autism in Delaware's public schools—today, there are 2,109. HB292 updates critical legal language not addressed since the early '80s. It also creates a pilot program that recognizes and begins to fund the need for specialized technical assistance and training staff for teachers in all districts educating students with autism.

During the Smart Cookie Day activities in the House of Representatives, HB292 will be renamed the Alex Eldreth Autism Education Act in honor of Autism Delaware's public policy and community outreach director who died the day after Thanksgiving.

HB104 mandates an increase in the rates paid to providers of services for adults with disabilities. The last time these services were fully funded was 2005. Since then, the pay for direct support professionals (DSPs) has not kept pace. As a result, issues arise around

attracting qualified DSPs, and the turnover rate is high. HB104 will raise the rates to more appropriate levels gradually over three years.

HB12 earmarks state funding for basic special education for students in kindergarten through the third grade. Currently, intensive and complex special education is being funded for these grades, but the basic special-education funding runs only from fourth through twelfth grade. By promoting basic special-education needs and earlier identification, costs are predicted to decrease over the long term. If HB12 is enacted, funding for K–3 special education will be phased in gradually over four years.

For more information, visit AutismDelaware.org. Or call Autism Delaware family services director Annalisa Ekbladh at (302) 224-6020, ext. 218, or send an email of interest to Annalisa.Ekbladh@delautism.org.

About Autism Delaware and autism spectrum disorder

In 1998, a group of Delaware parents got together to share their common experience of autism. They began by supporting each other, sharing information, and creating a vision for a better future for all who are affected by autism in our state. Over the last 20 years, Autism Delaware has grown into an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit made up of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), their family members, the professionals who serve them, and friends of people with ASD. With offices in Newark, Dover, and Lewes, Autism Delaware serves the entire state. Celebrating our 20th anniversary this year—and the 10th anniversary of our adult employment program known as Productive Opportunities for Work & Recreation (or POW&R, for short)—the agency’s mission continues to be to help people and families affected by ASD.

Autism Delaware’s programs and services are supported by state contracts and generous donations from individuals and corporations across Delaware. Fundraising events, such as the statewide Walk for Autism, help provide the income needed to make critical programs a reality. For more information on how to help, visit AutismDelaware.org.

ASD is a developmental disorder that includes impairment in social interaction and social communication. Individuals with ASD also exhibit repetitive patterns of behavior or interest that limit everyday functioning. An intellectual or language impairment is also possible. All these symptoms will first appear in early childhood.