

Statement of Congressman Elijah E. Cummings  
House Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness Hearing  
On  
“The Future Challenges of Autism: A Survey of the Ongoing Initiatives in  
the Federal Government to Address the Epidemic”  
November 20, 2003 at 2:00 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing to discuss the different ways the federal government is addressing the increase in diagnosis of autism and in providing services and financial assistance to autistic individuals and their families.

Although research on autism continues to occur at federal agencies and institutions, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the Center for Development and Behavior Learning at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, as well as many other organizations, the causes of autism are still unknown.

Although there is currently no known cure, there is a growing awareness of the nature of autism and the kinds of approaches to diagnosis, treatment, and care that are effective in meeting the needs of autistic children and their families.

Because of the new research and awareness of autism in the medical and educational community, autism is being diagnosed more frequently. With the increase in diagnosis, reporting, and demand for services, the number of documented children suffering from autism has skyrocketed in the United States. In fact, every state has shown increases in the rates of autism, making it possible that the number of autistic persons in the United States could reach 4 million within the next decade.

In order to ensure that everything is done to address this increase, the United States Government has rightfully appropriated money to the study of autism. I am convinced that with further research, a cause and cure for autism will likely be found. As such, I believe that Congress should do everything in its power to continue to support research that objectively addresses all theories for the cause of autism.

Hearings such as this one help to shed light on the seriousness of autism in the United States today, the steps the Federal Government has taken to address these concerns, as well as resources and processes available to help individuals diagnosed with autism and their families. I look forward to

hearing from all of our witnesses today as they discuss these issues, the current treatments that have been shown to benefit those affected with autism, along with the future plans available to address the upsurge of autism.

Once again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing.