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**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**ECLC of New Jersey Hosts Sen. Robert Menendez to Announce  
Passage of Autism CARES Act of 2014**

PARAMUS – Today, Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) returned to ECLC of New Jersey's Bergen P.R.I.D.E. Center to celebrate the passage and signing into law of the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education and Support (Autism CARES) Act. The legislation he authored ensures continuation of critical federal programs addressing autism spectrum disorders and includes first-ever dedicated federal efforts into the needs of young adults with autism as they age-out of school-based supports and services.

“The Autism CARES Act not only provides for the continuation of vital federal efforts, but ensures they provide better outcomes,” Sen. Menendez said, before a crowd of individuals with autism, their families, advocates and service providers. “The law now ensures that we continue research into potential causes, new early diagnostic and intervention techniques, and more effective supports and services for those with autism and their families, and it pays attention to the unique needs facing those transitioning to adulthood and to independent lives.”

Last summer, the Senator visited the Paramus facility for adults with special needs, including youth with autism spectrum disorder entering adulthood, to announce independent legislation specifically aimed at filling the gap in vital research aimed at adult services and supports. Key elements of the Senator's Assistance in Gaining Experience, Independence and Navigation (AGE-IN) Act were incorporated in the final Autism CARES bill, which passed Congress with unanimous, bipartisan support last month and was signed into law by the President on August 8, 2014.

According to a recent report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, autism rates climbed nearly 30 percent between 2008 and 2010, to one-in-68 children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, from one-in-88 children. In New Jersey, that prevalence is one-in-45 children. “We are excited about today's

announcement because at ECLC of New Jersey, we know firsthand the need to support people with special needs, as they age out of school, and grow into adulthood. ECLC has created a path for young people to successfully transition into adulthood, find meaning in their lives and grow through our employment and day programs. We are hopeful that this piece of legislation will enable many others across the country to do the same," said ECLC of New Jersey Executive Director Bruce Litinger. "I have been working in the special needs field for decades, and it's so gratifying to see the increased attention, funding and opportunities for people with disabilities. It's wonderful to see the Autism CARES Bill pass through the red tape of Washington and gain bipartisan support from both sides—Republicans and Democrats. We are extremely grateful for the work Sen. Menendez has done on behalf of people with disabilities."

In concluding his remarks, the Senator said, "We have to be vigilant and united in our support—to put a focus on transitioning youth and adult services—so that children with autism are able to fulfill their God-given potential and become successful, independent adults."

## **About ECLC**

Established in 1970, ECLC of New Jersey offers lifelong services -- education, enrichment and employment -- to children and adults with special needs, including those diagnosed with autism, Down syndrome and severe learning and/or language disabilities. As students prepare to graduate, transition specialists from ECLC's affiliate Community Personnel Services (CPS), take over, guiding them into the next chapter of their lives. CPS specialists find meaningful jobs in the students' communities and provide ongoing support and advocacy in the workplace.

Graduates who are not ready for work are guaranteed a spot in the P.R.I.D.E. program, if the placement is appropriate. The P.R.I.D.E. program launched in response to requests from parents seeking a program for their adult children who weren't ready to hold jobs. Many of them were languishing at home and didn't have opportunities for leading fulfilling lives in their communities.

P.R.I.D.E. has given them a purpose. It is a self-directed program for clients to continue developing their independent living skills. They stay connected to the community through activities outside of the center, volunteering and some paid work opportunities. Learn more about ECLC at [www.eclcofnj.org](http://www.eclcofnj.org).

ECLC is a member of the Alliance of Private Special Education Schools of North Jersey, a coalition of more than 30 state-approved private special education schools dedicated to helping parents and educators better understand and access appropriate program options. Learn more about the Alliance at <http://specialeducationalliancenj.org>.