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### **Governmental Affairs Update**

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The New Jersey Legislature was back at the State House in September after the summer recess, and The Arc of New Jersey weighed in on a number of bills making their way through Committee. This included supporting S2476 which would provide Medicaid coverage for services to treat and prevent Zika virus infection and associated health outcomes. Zika is a big threat to pregnant women, as the virus can cause developmental delays to unborn babies. The Arc of the United States and The Arc of New Jersey support increased funding to prevent the spread of Zika. The legislation was approved by the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee in early September and must now be heard by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

Also last month, the Governor signed S2566/S496 which establishes a Response to Intervention (RTI) initiative in the Department of Education (DOE) to support and encourage school districts in implementation of a RTI framework. The initiative requires the DOE Commissioner to provide information and guidance to school districts regarding the development and effective implementation of an RTI framework as a way to identify struggling learners, maximize student achievement, and reduce behavioral problems. Guidance will also include ways to effectively use RTI to identify students with specific learning disabilities in accordance with the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.”

In terms of federal advocacy, The Arc of New Jersey responded to several Action Alerts issued by The Arc of the United States regarding legislative and regulatory proposals. This includes supporting Kevin and Avonte’s Law to help prevent and reduce the harm from wandering by children with developmental disabilities, including autism. This bipartisan bill would allow Justice Department grants to be used by state and local law enforcement agencies and nonprofits to develop training and emergency protocols, supply first responders with additional information and resources, and make local tracking technology programs available for children who may wander because of their disability. One of New Jersey’s representatives, Congressman Chris Smith, is one of two main sponsors of the bill.

The Arc of New Jersey also weighed in with our federal representatives about The Recognize, Assist, Include, Support and Engage (RAISE) Family Caregivers Act. The bill would require Congress to create a national strategy to support caregivers of persons with disabilities. Lastly, we advocated for full funding of the Social Security Administration’s operating budget. This is important because more than 1 million people with disabilities are waiting more than 575 days on average for a hearing on their Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability claims.