



Autism Speaks strongly supports proposed ban on electrical stimulation devices

Proposed legislation includes reinstatement of FDA ban on electrical stimulation devices to curb self-harming and aggressive behaviors

May 11, 2022—This week, the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee will act on the [“Food and Drug Amendments of 2022,”](#) a bill that would, among additional provisions, reinstate the ban by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on the use of electrical stimulation devices (ESDs) to treat self-injurious or aggressive behavior. Autism Speaks strongly supports the reinstatement of this ban, which was driven forward by the bipartisan leadership of Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, Subcommittee Chair Eshoo and Ranking Member Guthrie. Autism Speaks continues to emphasize its support for evidence-based practices that address self-injurious and aggressive behaviors in a way that protects the physical and mental well-being of individuals.

In 2016, the FDA first proposed a ban on the use of ESDs in aversion therapy for children and adults with self-injurious or aggressive behaviors, which was formally put in place in March 2020. In this ban, the FDA noted that electrical stimulation devices present risks for psychological harm, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, fear, panic and other negative outcomes, further addressing the physical risks of pain and damage to tissues, such as skin, that ESDs pose. While a [federal appellate court decision](#) overturned the ban on July 6, 2021, saying the FDA did not have the authority to regulate medical practice, Congress now takes the necessary steps to put the restriction into statute and legally require its enforcement through the ESD ban proposed in the new legislation.

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the risk of harm in using ESDs and the practice’s disavowal by most autism centers and mental health hospitals in the United States, the practice still remains legal in the U.S. In supporting the electrical stimulation device ban within this legislation, Autism Speaks reaffirms its 2016 and 2021 statements supporting the prohibition of the use of ESDs and aversion therapy, and continues to assert that painful aversive conditioning has no place in the treatment of autism or any developmental disorder.

Autism Speaks is grateful for the bipartisan work of House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and Ranking Member Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) as well as Health Subcommittee Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA) and Ranking Member Brett Guthrie (R-KY) on such a critical issue and commends their commitment to protect people with disabilities from this practice. Our organization supports the inclusion of this specific provision and urges its passage through Congress and into law.