



# MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

*Every physician matters, each patient counts.*

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.172  
AN ACT TO ENHANCE HOSPITAL CARE FOR THOSE WITH AUTISM AND  
INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND PERSONS  
WITH DISABILITIES  
SEPTEMBER 12, 2023**

The Massachusetts Medical Society is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to give them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. The Medical Society strives to promote health equity and has policy in supporting of eliminating barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing and receiving appropriate care. For these reasons, **the Medical Society wishes to be recorded in support of H.172, *An Act to enhance hospital care for those with autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities***, which directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to create and maintain an integrated state plan to develop training, education and standards of care related to the diagnosis, treatment, and care of patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and those with intersecting marginalized identities.

H.172 will ensure that hospitals have the knowledge and skills to create a supportive and accessible health care environment for individuals with I/DD and ASD. People with I/DD and ASD often have unique health care needs and may require specialized care. Communication difficulties are common among individuals with I/DD and ASD, and this can impact their ability to effectively express their symptoms, discomfort, or medical history. Sensory sensitivities are particularly prevalent among individuals with ASD, and hospitals can be overwhelming environments for these patients. Education and training can help physicians and other health care professionals understand these needs and provide tailored care that leads to better patient outcomes.

For instance, health care professionals who receive education and training on I/DD and ASD can learn communications strategies such as using clear and concise language, visual aids, or alternative communication methods, enabling better understanding and accurate assessment of the patient's needs. Education and training can also help health care providers make necessary adaptations in the hospital environment to minimize sensory overload for patients with autism. This can include providing quiet spaces, reducing bright lights or loud noises, and considering sensory-friendly approaches to medical procedures. Being equipped with such skills ultimately helps prevent misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatments, and unnecessary hospitalizations. Moreover, people with I/DD and ASD often experience disparities in health care access and quality. H.172 would promote health equity for these patients through a multi-faceted approach that addresses both health care access and the utilization of inclusive and culturally sensitive services.

Education and training to health care professionals on caring for patients with I/DD and ASD can also extend to families and caregivers. By providing resources, guidance, and support, hospitals can empower families and caregivers to better understand and advocate for the health care needs of their loved ones. Listening and responding to the lived experiences of people with I/DD and ASD and their families can provide valuable insights and help physicians deliver more patient-centered care. This can lead to improved coordination of care, better adherence to treatment plans, and enhanced overall well-being for individuals with I/DD and ASD.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and for your work on this important issue. The Medical Society respectfully urges a favorable report on H.172, *An Act to enhance hospital care for those with autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities*.