

PROUD ASPY MOM · AUGUST 2026

SCHOOL *is Back in Session!*



Summer is over and School is BACK in session. I remember this time well. Shopping for new clothes, ordering books, fussing about sleep schedules and the ongoing medical appointments and forms necessary to return to school. As a

parent of a person on the spectrum, I felt anxiety and stress on how our family would accomplish these routine annual tasks. For some families living with persons with disabilities, these annual requirements are exacerbated by costs and additional tests. As a society we are all so busy. It is my hope that as our children and teachers return to school we give them grace and support them with compassion.

Caring for Kids Means Caring for Them

What is the deal with Kidcare?

So what is Kidcare?

It is a subsidized program for children who deal with real poverty. They live at 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The program gives children a shot at living a healthier life because Kidcare provides generous affordable rates for healthcare with premiums that are in reach for care.

In 2023 our state changed the formula to help more children and families. The FPL formula changed from two hundred percent (200%) to three hundred percent (300%).

> *"The Florida Kidcare Program implements the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in Florida. The CHIP provides federal matching funds to states to subsidize health insurance coverage for children in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid and meet other eligibility requirements. Kidcare is governed by part II of ch. 409, F.S. ...*
>
> *CS/CS/HB 121 expands eligibility for CHIP-funded Kidcare programs to children in families with household incomes up to 300% FPL from the current 200% FPL threshold. In addition, the bill authorizes the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation and AHCA to*

> *establish new premium tiers for enrollees above 150% FPL, including the new expansion group.*"
>
> HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS — CS/CS/HB 121, FLORIDA KIDCARE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY ›

I have shared this many times, but for the record I will say it again! On average families who support persons living with Autism Spectrum Disorder pay upwards of 70–100 thousand dollars annually.

> *Speech therapists*
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> *Occupational therapists*
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> *Behavioral therapists*
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> *Neurologists*
>
> *Pediatricians*
>
> *Psychologists*
>
> *Psychiatrists*
>
> *Specialists*

And that is before they age out into a system of healthcare that is not ready for them.

Leaders have a fiduciary duty to **LEAD**. We cannot say we care about kids and families and then not help kids and families. Caring for kids means **CARING** for them.

Resources:

Florida Policy Institute: Florida's out of excuses to expand KidCare ›

Florida Health Justice Project: Kidcare expansion status ›

HB 121 House staff final bill analysis (PDF) ›

Dreaded Assessments

Again, I still don't know what I think about technology but I do know it has a place in healthcare. There's been so much talk about Autism. We talk about vaccines. We talk about lifestyle. We talk about genetic propensities. We talk about the environment. Sometimes we should focus on how do we support people presently living on the spectrum. Let me say this clearly: I am not endorsing any particular technological innovation, however when I come across innovative ideas during my research, I like to share. A new diagnostic tool based on medical history and research is worth reviewing. It's called EarlyPoint.

> *"EarlyPoint is an eye tracking, actually the first FDA cleared eye tracking biomarker that helps to serve as a diagnostic aid to diagnose children with autism … [it's for children 16 to 95 months of age].*
>
> *[It is a] high-end eye tracking device. And then it goes up to the cloud, it's analyzed, and then you get a report that tells you whether the child has eye tracking behavior that is consistent or not consistent with autism, [you receive] a yes [or] no answer, which is really useful for clinicians. And then some very easy, very detailed parameters on social disability, verbal ability and nonverbal cognitive problem solving, which can be used to not only diagnose children, which is amazing in and of itself, but also to monitor their progress over time."*
>
> DR. CHERYL TIERNEY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER AT EARLYPOINT, ON THE RAD N BAD PODCAST, EPISODE 33: "WHO THE HELL IS THAT? THE HIGH-TECH FUTURE OF AUTISM DIAGNOSTICS," APRIL 13, 2026 ›

So why is this important? Everyone does not get the same level of care. That is just true at all levels of healthcare. When there are tests that are subjective that could help a population significantly if they were objective, the test would change WHO has access to care and HOW other professionals ultimately support the person on the spectrum.

Quick, reliable tests would open the door to insurance claims, medical treatment, school placement and therapies.

From my experience and from supporting families on various levels of the spectrum, the test can be long and mentally challenging. Innovation will not replace professional expertise, but it could serve as a significant aid to assessments.

LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Artificial Intelligence — OK

Educators constantly debate the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in classroom instruction, for student use, administrative ease, employer replacement, programs, supports — and on, and on, and on! I think most of us agree that AI is here to stay, it is used in all aspects of our lives, and it is hard to "police" how we use it in our everyday lives. There are so many ethical concerns, and if we are honest, many of us do not have a handle on how it will change our lives. But—

> *How will AI impact persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?*
>
> *How will educators use this tool to make access to education easier?*
>
> *Will students with verbal, non-verbal, and profound autism embrace AI?*
>
> *Here's a question — will they need educators at all?*

ALREADY HAPPENING

Overworked and understaffed: Special ed teachers turn to AI for help

A fast-growing number of special educators nationwide are using AI to create customized education plans. Despite the risks, some research shows it could improve the quality of teachers' work. NPR, May 2026

LISTEN AT NPR

I do not have answers to these questions, but as a parent of two highly intelligent daughters who were destined to express their brilliance with or without my help, I believe AI is a game changer for differential learners.

I do not have words for how "intelligent" my older daughter is. (Even while I am drafting this sentence I am cognizant of her incredible command of the English language and possible criticism.) Her capabilities were identified very early, and because seasoned educators stepped in, we were able to place her in environments that challenged her.

Our younger daughter — also brilliant in different ways — demonstrated what seemed like "super power" qualities for someone her age. If our family did not accept her differences, we would not be where we are.

NOW — add AI! No issues with communications, accelerate learning, explore what the brain specifically wants to explore, enhance deficits, and do all this in milliseconds. Again, I have not landed on how I feel about AI. (Both of our daughters are NOT fans.) Still, I concede that for all the challenges we experienced from kindergarten through high school, some may have been mitigated with AI — OK!

Welcome your thoughts!

SEND ME AN EMAIL



Work to Do!

For those of you who know me personally, you know I live by a strong moral code.

> *LOVE thy neighbors*
>
> *To whom much is GIVEN, much is expected*
>
> *Do not make it worse for other people*
>
> *Kindness matters*
>
> *A setback is a setup for success*

Our family is the beneficiary of significant grace. As I reflect on our next generation, I am grateful that they are tolerant, talented, and interested in the world beyond their immediate community.

I am often asked why I believe community matters. We may come into this world alone and we leave it the same way — but in between we have an opportunity to make it better for each of us. It is my continued mission to make the world more inclusive for persons who live with disabilities.

Still MORE work to do!



We all NEED champions

My aunt, Mary Elizabeth Branch, transitioned this week. She was my champion and supported me at every stage of life. I LOVE everything about her. She taught me to LIVE and LAUGH. She taught me to PRAY. She taught me to NOT take life so seriously. (She worked on that until the end of her life.) And most importantly she taught me that we are never given MORE than we can handle.

My aunt had names for each of her loved ones. She called my older daughter PERFECT and my younger daughter GENIUS. WE all need champions. I am SO blessed to have had her unconditional love.

Thank you Aunt Mary for encouraging me to testify.

STAY CONNECTED

Keep up between issues — on the blog, in the archive, and online.

BLOG · NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE · SPEAKING · LINKEDIN · INSTAGRAM

With gratitude,

KIMBERLY G. JACKSON

ATTORNEY · ADVOCATE · SPEAKER

K

kimberlygjackson.com

You are receiving this because you are part of the Proud Aspy Mom community.
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