

This bi-weekly email newsletter is part of NHMCs Information Education Movement and aims to educate and empower the NHMC community by providing accurate information, debunking information fraud, and encouraging civic engagement.



(Getty Images/Alex Wong)

Debunking Information Fraud:

Fact or Fiction?

During his first press conference as secretary of HHS, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. likened autism to a measles epidemic. He stated that the steady rise in autism prevalence is not due to increased access of information over the last decade, but because of an increased exposure to a risk factor still unknown. *This claim is misleading and has been debunked by scientific research reports.*

On Wednesday, April 16, 2025, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced his first research plans toward combating autism as the HHS secretary. He stated that the rising prevalence of autism in the U.S. is equivalent to an epidemic and that time is essential to studying the potential risk factors. The urgent declaration comes within a day of the CDC's [report](#) on autism rates among children in the U.S. The report shows that about 1 in every 31 children was diagnosed with autism by age 8 in 2022, an increase from 1 in 36 in 2020.

No, autism is not a disease or epidemic. According to the CDC, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability characterized by difficulties with social interaction or communication. It is a

multifactorial condition that is influenced heavily by genetics.



(UN Photo / Mark Garten)

Dr. Walter Zahorodny, associate professor at Rutgers Medical School and co-author of the recent CDC report, spoke alongside Kennedy at Wednesday's news conference. He reinforced the view that the increasing rates of autism represent an “urgent public health crisis, that cannot be explained by heightened awareness alone. Experts emphasize that there is no actual surge in cases, but an increase of accessible information.

As part of his research into autism, Kennedy announced plans to launch a national autism registry utilizing Americans' private health data: information from pharmacy chains, lab tests, genomic data, smartwatches, and insurance claims. The initiative aims to support autism research by providing real-time patient data to up to 20 research groups. However, Kennedy's approach and statements have raised concerns about data privacy, stigmatization, and the potential for undermining progress in autism research and acceptance.

To learn more about ASD, click [here](#).

To learn more, click [here](#).

For more information on how to recognize information fraud, refer to [NHMC's Information Fraud Guide](#).

Weekly Dose of Positivity:

From PR to the World

NPR finally released the long-awaited Bad Bunny tiny desk concert, fulfilling the requests of thousands of fans. The Puerto Rican singer made his debut on Monday, April 7, 2025 with popular songs like “PIToRRO DE COCO”, “VOY A LLeVARTE PA PR”, “KLOuFRENS”, “LO QUE LE PASÓ A HAWAii”, and “LA MuDANZA.” The room reflects the vibrant colors and culture of Puerto Rico, including the iconic Puerto Rican flag associated with the Puerto Rican independence movement. Amidst the music and laughter, Benito talked about the inspiration behind one of the songs and how he couldn't fall back asleep unless he wrote down the lyrics. “LO QUE LE PASÓ A HAWAii” famously deals with Puerto Rico's colonization and gentrification. To conclude the performance, he launched onto a



(Photo Credit: NPR)

wonderful anecdote of a conversation with a stranger about Puerto Rico's colonial status and relationship with the U.S. to set up the the next song, "LA MuDANZA."

To learn more, click [here](#).

To watch the performance, click [here](#).

Legislation Outlook:

Tennessee Senate Bill 836

This month, Senator Bo Watson of Tennessee introduced a bill aimed at ensuring undocumented children are no longer enrolled in public schools. In a 19-13 vote, the bill ultimately passed the Senate floor despite a month of protests and opposition from community and civil rights activists. The amended version of the bill will require Tennessee schools and local education agencies to verify the immigration status of the child enrolled. Documentation must show that the student is either "a citizen of the United States; is in the process of obtaining citizenship; or holds a legal immigration or visa status." Currently, the corresponding house bill is being protested by civil rights activists, educators, and the community in hopes of stopping the amendment from passing.

To learn more, click [here](#).



(Photo Credit: Martin B. Cherry / Nashville Banner)

Information to Know:

Student Loan Debt Collections

The Department of Education announced Monday, April 21, that it will start collecting on defaulted federal student loans on May 5. The involuntary collections will be handled through the Treasury Department's Offset Program, which recovers unpaid balances by withholding payments like tax refunds, federal wages, and Social Security benefits. In the next two weeks, student loan borrowers will receive emails from the Treasury Offset Program to urge them into different repayment options. In addition, wage garnishment will also resume after a 30-day notice is sent beginning May 5.



(Getty Images / Win McNamee)

Why is this important?

The Trump administration paused payments, accrual interests, and collections on federal student loans in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic with the Biden administration extending that pause until October 2024. **The Department of Education reports that more than 5 million borrowers are in**

default with student loan debt and 4 million more could be in that position after graduation this year. This makes up almost 25% of the federal student loan portfolio. For students and their families, the changing student loan policies will be one more thing for them to worry about.

To learn more, click [here](#).

To learn more about student loan repayments, click [here](#).



Photo by Getty Images

Quote of the Week:

"Now you can turn away and you can ignore what goes on, but if you do that, you do it at your own peril. We need you to stand up to fight for justice. To fight for economic justice, social justice and racial justice."

- Senator Bernie Sanders at Coachella Weekend 1, a surprise stop on the "The Fight Oligarchy" tour. To learn more click [here](#).

Useful Tips and Tools:

[Universities Opposing 'Government Intrusion' - PBSNews](#)

[State of the People | Power Tour](#)

[Autism Organizations Release Joint Statement](#)

[Donate to NHMC](#)

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