

To the Editor,

An often-misunderstood disability affecting 1 in 20 of America's children is gaining more and more attention in Congress, thanks to dedicated advocates and organizations across the country. The disability is fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), an umbrella term for the spectrum of diagnoses resulting from prenatal alcohol exposure.

The FASD Respect Act (S.1800/HR.3946), introduced by Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Representatives Don Bacon (R-NE) and Betty McCollum (D-MN), provides the resources for state, local, and tribal systems to better serve the FASD community. This bipartisan bill has been cosponsored by 65 legislators across the Senate and House and has been endorsed by over 300 organizations and healthcare professionals nationwide.

FASD is sometimes referred to as a non-apparent or hidden disability and is often misdiagnosed or undiagnosed. Thankfully, the FASD Respect Act reauthorizes federal programs that will make it easier for individuals and families to receive an early diagnosis and interventions that can make a significant difference in their life.

There is also a need to promote healthy pregnancies and to bring awareness to prenatal alcohol exposure. We know that drinking during pregnancy often happens due to a lack of information, not knowing about the pregnancy, or an alcohol use disorder- it does not happen intentionally. Thoughtful and supportive prevention measures are needed to help dispel stigmatizing myths about alcohol use during pregnancy.

FASD affects many families directly but is also affects all of us as Americans. When we do not provide the proper supports to the FASD community, we are limiting their potential to be fully integrated into society. Right now, we all have a chance to advocate for valued members of our community by urging our legislators to pass the FASD Respect before the end of the 118th Congress.