Spoken For

When autistic children can’t speak up for themselves, parents must be their voice.

December 6, 2012 By Kate Ferguson

Last year, a Los Angeles Times series on autism—a complex developmental disability—exposed California for spending more money on autistic white children than on autistic African Americans and other kids of color. The article caused a stir.

“This disparity is scandalous,” says Areva Martin, a lawyer who is the founder, president and CEO of Special Needs Network Inc., a nonprofit that advocates on behalf of children with developmental disabilities. “It may raise a constitutional question of systematic deprivation and denial of services. It is certainly a civil rights issue. But what’s more, it’s simply bad practice to prevent thousands of children from getting the services they need.”

Martin’s passion about the issue grew after she found it difficult to get the special services she needed for her autistic son, Marty. Today, she urges parents to educate themselves about the condition so they can advocate for their kids.

Says Martin, “Don’t be afraid to ask questions, even if you think it’s a silly question.”

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