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March 20, 2009

Dear Colleague:

This year, I will be wearing the color purple on March 26th in support of epilepsy awareness. Purple Day is a wonderful grassroots initiative that was begun last year by a courageous nine year-old Canadian girl named Cassidy Megan. Cassidy wanted to increase awareness about her disorder and to get people talking about epilepsy in an effort to dispel myths and inform those with seizures that they are not alone. So, she began the movement of Purple Day, lavender being the internationally recognized color for epilepsy.

Last year, members of the Canadian Parliament learned about the initiative and opted to wear purple. This year, the New Jersey-based Anita Kaufmann Foundation has taken up the cause, and is asking members of Congress to increase epilepsy awareness by wearing purple.

Epilepsy is one of the most common chronic neurological disorders. In the United States alone, there are three million Americans or 1 in 100 people with epilepsy. Worldwide, there are fifty million with epilepsy. That is more common than multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy and Parkinson's disease combined. Yet, it is the stigma associated with epilepsy and seizures that is often worse than the condition itself.

Epilepsy is a seizure disorder. It is not a psychological disorder, nor a disease, and it is not contagious. Our society often discriminates or creates obstacles for individuals with medical problems, especially those with disorders that are misunderstood. And epilepsy is an example of a disorder in which lack of information and misinformation is common among the general population. Increasing public awareness about epilepsy and advocating for patients and families remains critical for improving the quality of lives for people with epilepsy.

I hope you will join me in wearing purple on *Purple Day - March 26th* - to raise awareness about epilepsy and to let our constituents know that small voices can be heard and health advocacy can begin with one simple and poignant message. If you have any questions, please contact my office. You can also visit www.purpleday.org for more information.

Sincerely,



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator