

Dear Port of Seattle Commissioners:

As the Program Manager for The Arc's Wings for Autism<sup>®</sup> program at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, a member of the Board of Directors for The Arc of King County and a parent of an adult with autism who has experienced the challenges of travel, I would like to express my support of the proposed Sensory Room at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

One in 59 children has been identified in the US with an autism spectrum disorder (CDC Statistics, September 2019) and TSA has reported a 56% increase in the number of requests for assistance for passengers with autism as of mid-year 2019. Airports and air travel are one of the biggest obstacles to travel for a person with autism or a sensory processing disorder where the brain has trouble processing and regulating sensory input. (A sensory processing disorder means that the brain does not process sensory input the same way as it would in a typical person-noises may seem much louder for instance.) The chaotic and unpredictable nature of the airport; the unknown environment, the loud noise, odors, flashing lights, bright colors and massive crowds are overwhelming to someone with autism. Waiting in line, the changes in schedule and routine, checking luggage, passing through security add to the stress, and this is before the flight even begins. Many families we work with have been unable to travel by air for these reasons and end up driving across the country to their destination as they then have the option of taking a break just to decompress and reset, or not traveling at all.

With the goal of making Seattle-Tacoma International Airport the most inclusive airport, having a Sensory Room at the airport would make a huge difference in the lives of those travelling with autism, dementia and other sensory processing and anxiety disorders, their families and all air travelers. The space would allow individuals who have become over-stimulated by the environment the chance to calm down and decompress before boarding the flight. Having a quiet space with soothing light, calming colors and an opportunity for proprioceptive input (interactive pushing, pulling, lifting) will relax the over-stimulated nervous system, allowing that individual the opportunity to reset prior to the rest of the trip. And this room will be utilized by all ages, as sensory processing disorders occur across the lifespan. Parents and travel companions would plan their trip with this room in mind, as a destination safe spot prior to departure and on their return from their destination. Airport, airline and TSA employees would now have a calming place they could share with passengers to assist those in need of respite.

Please consider funding this project. A Sensory Room will make a real difference to those living with autism and sensory processing disorders, their families and all air travelers.

Sincerely,

*Stacia Irons*



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