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***GREAT PHOTO AND VIDEO OPPORTUNITY!***

**Wings for All**™ **Program Comes to Austin!**

**Austin, TX** – On September 10th, The Arc will host the [Wings for All](http://www.thearc.org/wingsforautism)™ event at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS)! This event is being held in partnership with AUS, American Airlines, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), The Arc of Texas, The Arc of The Capital Area, The Autism Society of Central Texas, and the Doug Flutie Foundation. Wings for All™, one of The Arc’s newest national initiatives, is an airport “rehearsal” specially designed for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), their families, and aviation professionals.

 Wings for All™ is designed to alleviate some of the stress that people with I/DD and their families experience when traveling by air. The program provides families with the opportunity to participate in the entire airport experience by practicing entering the airport, obtaining boarding passes, going through security, and boarding an airplane. *Wings for All™ also gives the airport, airline, TSA professionals and other personnel the opportunity to observe, interact and deliver their services in a structured learning environment*. Since the national rollout, thousands of individuals from across the country have taken part in these events.

Upon arrival, event attendees will check-in to receive their boarding pass, go through security, and be greeted at the gate prior to boarding the plane. Aviation professionals will work with families and volunteers to learn more about meeting the needs of people with I/DD. Participants and airline staff will be able to share stories, information, ideas, and best practices for creating an inclusive and safe airport experience for all. Staff and volunteer orientation will be Sept 9th.

**MEDIA RSVP REQUIRED:** Media must contact Aviation PIO Jason Zielinski, jason.zielinski@austintexas.gov, (512-530-6618) by 5pm on September 8 with name and date of birth to confirm attendance for this event. Media must also contact Aviation PIO prior to arriving at the airport at 512-715-4287(4AUS) for access and instructions for receiving a visitor’s pass.

**Interview, photo and video opportunities available!**

"The Autism Society of Central Texas is thrilled to work collaboratively to bring this experience to Austin and to our autism community. We look forward to helping families with autism learn how to better navigate the airport and travel to new locations."  Suzanne Potts, LMSW, MPH Executive Director

“The Arc of the Capital Area, is proud to be part of the very first Wings for All here in Austin at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. For many children and adults who experience autism and/or an intellectual/developmental disability (I/DD) air travel can be challenging and difficult. This program is a proactive approach that can alleviate some of the stress individuals and their families may feel and also help to provide additional training to the airport and airline professionals about how best to serve children and adults with autism or other I/DD in the future. We are grateful to our partners for their commitment to making this new initiative possible.” Mary Van Haneghan, Ed.D. Executive Director for The Arc of the Capital Area

“The enjoyment and convenience of air travel is available for all. This opportunity allows families with special needs to be prepared in advance so as to have a smoother travel experience,” said Jim Smith, Executive Director, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

**The Arc of Texas** - The Arc of Texas advocates for and serves people with I/DD, including Down syndrome, autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy and other diagnoses. The Arc of Texas has a network of 32 chapters across the State of Texas promoting and protecting the human rights of people with I/DD and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.