

From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**



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AUTISM SPEAKS ENDORSES ALASKA AUTISM INSURANCE REFORM BILL

House Bill 187 Would End Health Care Discrimination Against Children with Autism by Requiring Coverage of Diagnosis and Treatment

Juneau, AK (March 19, 2009) – Autism Speaks, the nation’s largest autism advocacy organization, today announced its support for House Bill 187, also known as the autism insurance reform bill. The legislation would require private health insurance companies to cover the diagnosis, testing and treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The maximum benefit would be \$36,000 per year.

Sponsored in the Alaska State House of Representatives by State Representative Pete Petersen (D-19) HB 187 includes coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), an evidence-based, medically-necessary autism therapy.

“We applaud and thank Representative Petersen for his leadership on this issue of critical concern to thousands of Alaska families,” said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks Vice President of Government Relations. “Autism Speaks joins Alaska’s autism community in calling on the legislature to pass HB 187 and join the growing number of states that have ended healthcare discrimination against children with autism.”

Most states do not require private insurance companies to cover even essential autism treatments and services. In the absence of coverage, families often pay as much as they can out-of-pocket for services that can cost upwards of \$50,000 per year. In the process, many risk their homes and the educations of their unaffected children – essentially mortgaging their entire futures.

Eight states – Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas -- have enacted autism insurance reform legislation. Several other state legislatures will vote on similar legislation during the current session.

To learn more about Autism Votes, an initiative of Autism Speaks focused on federal and state legislative advocacy, please visit www.autismvotes.org.

About Autism

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The prevalence of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

About Autism Speaks

Autism Speaks is dedicated to increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders, to funding research into the causes, prevention and treatments for autism, and to advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. It was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Bob Wright is Senior Advisor at Lee Equity Partners and served as vice chairman, General Electric, and chief executive officer of NBC and NBC Universal for more than twenty years. Autism Speaks merged with both the National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR) and Cure Autism Now (CAN), bringing together the nation's three leading autism advocacy organizations. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org

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