

From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

Rubenstein Communications, Inc.
Jocelyn Aframe – 212.843.8285; jaframe@rubenstein.com



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS APPLAUDS PENNSYLVANIA SENATE FOR PASSING AUTISM
LEGISLATION - HOUSE BILL 1150**

NEW YORK, NY (June 30, 2008) -- Autism Speaks today applauded the Pennsylvania Senate for passing the autism insurance reform legislation HB 1150. The bill which would create a new "Autism Spectrum Disorders Coverage" provision of the Pennsylvania insurance law passed through the Senate on Sunday night, 49-1. Autism Speaks thanked bill co-sponsor Senator Jane Orie, and Senators Don White, Dominic Pileggi, Joseph Scarnati, Michael Stack, Robert Mellow and Anthony Williams for their support of this important step in requiring insurance to cover necessary autism therapies.

"This extraordinary bipartisan vote, with the Pennsylvania Senate's foremost liberals and conservatives joining together, shows the merits of the fair and reasonable compromise reflected in this bill," said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks vice president of government relations. "Every community of advocates for a cause will contain some who will let the perfect be the enemy of the good and who prefer righteous failure to practical success. Autism Speaks is in the fight for the rights of autistic children and their families for the long haul and we will continue to advance the interests of those we serve, step by step."

The Pennsylvania bill provides \$36,000 a year for Applied Behavior Analysis and other necessary treatments up to age 21, with no lifetime cap. It also creates a first ever, under Pennsylvania law, expedited appeals procedure for denied claims, as a safeguard to ensure the law is followed. The bill also turns the existing state welfare program for autism into a statutory requirement, to ensure that those who receive government provided services can continue to do so, while allowing for the development of a private sector delivery system with insurance reimbursement, offering families an alternative to coverage through Medicaid. "While critics of this legislation have charged that the bill will harm those Pennsylvanians benefiting from Department of Public Welfare services, there will be no reason of law or policy, once HB1150 is enacted, that DPW cannot cover appropriate claims by families wrongly denied services by a private insurer," said Emken.

The Pennsylvania bill addresses discrimination against individuals with autism, and provides them the same medical necessity standards as afforded individuals with cancer, diabetes, and the common cold, allowing individuals with autism to be treated as all others are in the private insurance market. The medical necessity standards in the Senate passed bill are identical to those in the autism coverage mandates of several other states and a number of large employer, self-insured plans, already having a track record of providing insurance reimbursement for autism services.

The bill passed is expected to be voted on by the full House before July 4th.

Autism Speaks once again thanks and honors Pennsylvania House Speaker Dennis O'Brien for his unwavering commitment, throughout his distinguished career, to the children and families of the autism community in Pennsylvania.

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 extreme 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 diagnosis 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 the Autism Coalition for Research and Education (ACRE), the National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR) and Cure Autism Now (CAN), bringing together the nation's leading autism advocacy organizations. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org

###