



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**
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**AUTISM SPEAKS HAILS THE INTRODUCTION OF THE LANDMARK
AUTISM TREATMENT ACCELERATION ACT IN THE U.S. HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Wide-Ranging Legislation Addresses Key Issues Facing the Autism Community,
Including Services for Adults and Insurance Reform**

NEW YORK, NY (May 15, 2009) – Autism Speaks, the nation’s largest autism science and advocacy organization, today applauded the introduction of the groundbreaking Autism Treatment Acceleration Act (ATAA) in the U.S. House of Representatives. Introduced by Representatives Mike Doyle (D-PA), Chris Smith (D-NJ), Eliot Engel (D-NY), and Hank Johnson (D-GA), ATAA is comprehensive federal legislation that addresses several critical challenges facing the autism community, including increased funding for scientific research, treatment and services. The House ATAA bill was introduced yesterday as a companion to the bill introduced in the Senate last month by Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL), Robert Casey (D-PA), and Robert Menendez (D-NJ). The ATAA incorporates provisions from the Expanding the Promise of Individuals with Autism Act (EPIAA) originally proposed in the House by Representatives Doyle, Smith, Engel, and former-Representative Chip Pickering (R-MS).

As in the Senate’s ATAA bill, a key section of the House bill requires insurance companies to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), including coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy – a medically necessary, evidence-based autism treatment – and assistive communication devices. In most states, insurers are currently allowed to specifically exclude coverage for these critical services, which can cost upward of \$50,000 a year – well beyond the means of most families.

“This legislation would dramatically increase the federal government’s commitment to addressing the challenges faced by individuals with autism and their families,” said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks vice president of Government Relations. “The insurance reform section of the bill, in particular, will have an enormous impact by finally requiring insurers to end discrimination against children with autism and cover therapies that are literally causing families across the country to go broke trying to provide their children with the services they need and deserve.”

To help address the unique needs of adults with ASDs, the bill would create a demonstration project with one-year planning grants and multi-year implementation

grants for the provision of service for adults with autism. These services would address important issues such as education and employment, housing, nutrition and wellness, social activities, and transportation and personal safety.

A National Network for Autism Spectrum Disorders Research and Services would be created to maximize existing autism treatment and service capacity and to strengthen linkages between autism research and services initiatives at the federal, regional, state, and local levels. The network would act to expedite the dissemination of critical data and evidence-based or promising practices. These initiatives are aimed at accelerating the dissemination and utilization of critical, new information, moving it from “bench to bedside” as quickly as possible.

“The Autism Treatment Acceleration Act would codify important commitments made by candidate and now-President Obama to support individuals with autism, their families and communities,” said Bob Wright, co-Founder of Autism Speaks. “Now it is incumbent on our Congressmembers and Senators to step up and support this legislation, which has the potential to dramatically and directly impact the millions of Americans whose lives have been affected by this disorder.”

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 the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. Autism Speaks funds more than \$30 million each year in new autism research, in addition to supporting the Autism Treatment Network, Autism Genetic Resource Exchange, Autism Clinical Trials Network, Autism Tissue Program and a range of other scientific and medical programs. Notable awareness initiatives include the establishment of the annual United Nations-sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day on April 2 and an award-winning, multi-year national public service advertising campaign with the Ad Council. Autism Speaks' family services efforts include the Autism Video Glossary, a 100 Day Kit for newly-diagnosed families, a School Community Tool Kit and the distribution of community grants to local service providers. Its government relations department, through its Autism Votes initiative, has played a critical role in securing federal legislation to advance the federal government's response to autism, and has successfully advocated for insurance reform to require insurers to cover medically-necessary autism therapies. Each year, Walk Now for Autism Speaks fundraising events are held in more than 70 cities across the country, as well as Canada and the United Kingdom. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org.

About the Co-Founders

Autism Speaks 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. He also serves on the board of directors of the Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation and RAND Corporation. Suzanne Wright has an extensive history of active involvement in community and philanthropic endeavors, mostly directed toward helping children. She serves on the boards of several non-profit organizations and is also Trustee Emeritus of Sarah Lawrence College, her alma mater.

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