



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**
Rebecca Shaffer Stelzner
202.955.3114; rshaffer@autismspeaks.org

Rubenstein Communications, Inc.
Adam Pockriss – 212.843.8286; apockriss@rubenstein.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS APPLAUDS NEW MEXICO GOVERNOR
BILL RICHARDSON FOR ENACTING AUTISM INSURANCE REFORM BILL**

**New Mexico Becomes Ninth State in the Nation with Comprehensive Autism
Insurance Reform**

NEW YORK, NY (April 3, 2009) -- Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, today joined the New Mexico autism community to praise New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson for signing into law Senate Bill 39, which requires insurance companies to provide coverage of evidence-based, medically necessary autism therapies. The Governor signed the bill yesterday, in honor of World Autism Awareness day, making New Mexico the ninth state in the country to enact comprehensive autism insurance reform.

The New Mexico law requires insurers to cover up to \$36,000 a year for treatments and therapies, including Applied Behavior Analysis therapy for children until age nineteen, or age twenty-two if the individual is enrolled in high school. It also sets a maximum lifetime coverage limit of \$200,000. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is recognized as an effective, evidence-based treatment for children with autism. The law specifies that there cannot be any limit put on the number of visits to an autism service provider and that the maximum per year benefit will be adjusted annually for inflation.

"So many New Mexican families with autistic children can't afford to pay for therapy and medical services out of pocket -- this bill will help ease the costs for those dealing with autism spectrum disorder," said Governor Richardson. "While most health insurance policies have significant limitations on treatment, New Mexico will now have a law in place that will give people living with autism, the benefits they deserve."

"This is a great day for the thousands of New Mexico families who now know their children will finally get the treatments they need and deserve," said Elizabeth Emken, vice president of government relations. Legislatures across the country are introducing and passing bills that put an end to the discriminatory practices by insurance companies against children with an autism diagnosis. We thank New Mexico's legislators and Governor Richardson for having the courage to put families and their needs first."

In many states, insurers explicitly exclude coverage of these therapies from policies, which places a significant financial burden on families seeking to provide their children

with necessary services. New Mexico joins eight other states – Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas – that have passed similar autism insurance reform bills. Twenty-six states have introduced bills this year, and New Mexico is the first to pass.

Senate Bill 39 was sponsored by State Senator Clinton D. Harden (R-7) in the New Mexico State Senate. A similar bill, House Bill 155, was introduced by State Representative Joni Marie Gutierrez (D-33).

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 ["world's" for WAAD and other international releases] 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, Autism Speaks *Walk Now for Autism* fundraising events are held in more than 70 cities across the country, as well as Canada and the United Kingdom.

Autism Speaks was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism, and provides a voice to hundreds of thousands of families. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org.

###