



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS JOINS GEORGIA PARENTS AND AUTISM
ADVOCATES IN DENOUNCING GEORGIA CHAMBER'S
"TRILLION" DOLLAR CLAIM**

**Georgia Chamber of Commerce initiates a campaign of lies and smears to
prevent Georgia's families' access to healthcare coverage**

ATLANTA, GA (March 10, 2009) – Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, today has asked Georgia legislators to admonish the Georgia Chamber of Commerce for their vindictive anti-family public campaign and to reject their absurd claim that autism insurance reform legislation, SB161 and HB426, will cost an "estimated \$3.9 trillion a year annually".

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce in a statement to Georgia's state House Insurance Committee, warned legislators that the cost for insuring children with autism could top more than a trillion dollars. Licensed actuaries have put the actual cost at \$21.20 per policy holder.

"A trillion, billion, million dollars—who are they kidding? These amateurish calculations are being thrown around to prey upon people's fears and vulnerabilities, when the Chamber should instead be focusing on Georgia's families, and their own membership, who are living with autism and facing insurmountable medical expenses," said Elizabeth Emken, Vice President of Government Relations for Autism Speaks. "1 in 150 children are diagnosed with autism, in Georgia and across the country. The forces that oppose access to healthcare coverage will clearly go to any lengths, churning out bold-faced lies and damaging misinformation with no remorse or thought."

Autism Speaks has released an actuarial study (www.autismvotes.org) developed by the Actuarial Consulting practice of Oliver Wyman, an international consulting firm, that has developed a model to estimate the costs associated with state laws addressing coverage for the treatments of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) including Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Based on this analysis, the Georgia legislation would only increase insurance premiums by 0.63% and provides families with medically necessary coverage of ABA and other evidenced-based treatments for ASDs.

"The Georgia Chamber has knowingly misled legislators by choosing to ignore professional actuarial work, and has instead adopted the same spurious methods that

were recently used in Oklahoma and are now being challenged in the courts. Flawed studies and conjecture hurt families, shifts costs onto school systems, and encourages individual economic hardship, as opposed to finding solutions, “added Emken.

Eight states – Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas -- have enacted autism insurance reform legislation to cover 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. 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 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. 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. 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. 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.

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