



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS LAUDS SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND'S
INTRODUCTION OF SENATE BILL EXPANDING MILITARY INSURANCE
COVERAGE OF AUTISM THERAPIES**

NEW YORK, NY (June 2, 2009) -- Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, today applauded Senator Kristen Gillibrand's (D-NY) introduction of the Uniformed Services with Autism (USA) Heroes Act, a senate companion bill to H.R. 1600. The legislation would require expanded coverage by TRICARE -- the Department of Defense's health care program for members of the uniformed services and their families -- of medically necessary autism therapies for military dependents who have autism.

Current law limits TRICARE coverage of autism therapies, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, for dependents of active duty service members and places a \$3,000 monthly cap on a child's treatment program. The USA Heroes Act will remove the dollar cap and increase accessibility of ABA and other essential, medically necessary autism treatments by extending benefits to retirees.

H.R. 1600 was introduced by Representatives Joe Sestak (D-PA), Walter B. Jones (R-NC), and Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX).

"We commend Senator Gillibrand for her commitment to individuals with autism and their families, and for making expanded autism insurance coverage a legislative priority," said Bob Wright, co-founder of Autism Speaks. "Families across the country are literally going broke trying to provide their children with the therapies they need and deserve. Now is the time for private and public insurers alike to end discrimination against children with autism and cover these critical services."

"This legislation is an important complement to successful, ongoing state and federal efforts to ensure that every American child with autism has access to medically-necessary, evidence-based therapies," said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks vice president of government relations.

The USA Heroes Act is part of a three-part plan Senator Gillibrand announced this week that also includes her co-sponsorship of the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act, which would require private insurers to provide coverage of medically-necessary autism treatments. In many states, insurers explicitly exclude such coverage from their policies.

The Senator also called for increased federal investment in autism research by allocating a portion of the additional \$10 billion given to the National Institute of Health (NIH) under the President Obama's Economic Recovery plan.

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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