

From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS APPLAUDS LOUISIANA GOVERNOR BOBBY JINDAL
FOR SIGNING AUTISM INSURANCE REFORM LEGISLATION INTO LAW**

BATON ROUGE, LA (July 16, 2008) -- Autism Speaks today commended Governor Bobby Jindal for signing into law HB 958, which makes Louisiana one of eight states, to date, that have ended insurance discrimination against children with autism. The law requires insurers to cover up to \$36,000 a year for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and other necessary treatments until age 17. Governor Jindal formally signed the bill at a ceremony at the Greater Baton Rouge Families Helping Families office. An employee, Toni Peters, was instrumental in bringing the idea for the legislation to the attention of Representative Franklin J. Foil of Baton Rouge, the bill's sponsor.

HB 958 requires group health insurance plans and Office of Group Benefits programs to provide coverage of the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders. The coverage is for a maximum benefit of \$36,000 per year (adjusted for inflation on an annual basis) with a lifetime limit of \$144,000. There is no limit on the number of visits an individual may make to an autism services provider.

In addition to Rep. Foil, Autism Speaks thanked bill co-authors Rep. Patrick Williams of Shreveport and Sen. Don Cravins of Opelousas for their leadership in helping to secure unanimous support in the House and Senate.

"Thanks to this legislation, children with autism in our state will get the services they need and deserve, while the long-term cost of their care to society is dramatically reduced," said Shelley Hendrix, Autism Speaks National Director of State Advocacy and a Louisiana parent of a son with autism. "This is a major victory for children with autism and families who are sometimes forced to sacrifice everything they have in order to pay for critical autism therapies."

"I am thrilled that Louisiana is taking the lead on helping children with autism," said Rep. Foil. "This legislation will give families more access to expensive, but important, medical treatment."

Autism insurance reform legislation has now been enacted in eight states across the country, with many others currently considering legislative action. Last week, Pennsylvania became the latest state to address the tremendous financial burden faced by families affected by autism when Governor Ed Rendell signed HB 1150 into law.

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.

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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

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