

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 ENDORSES MAINE AUTISM INSURANCE
REFORM BILL**

**LD 1198 Would End Health Care Discrimination Against Children
with Autism by Requiring Coverage of Diagnosis and Treatment**

Augusta, ME (March 28, 2009) – Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism advocacy organization, today announced its support for LD 1198 (SP 446), the autism insurance reform bill. The legislation would require private health insurance companies to cover the screening, diagnosis, testing and treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) for individuals up to the age of 21. The maximum benefit would be \$36,000 per year.

Sponsored in the Maine State Senate by State Senator Peter Bowman (D-1), LD 1198 includes coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), an evidence-based, medically-necessary autism therapy.

“We applaud and thank Senator Bowman for his leadership on this issue of critical concern to thousands of Maine families,” said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks Vice President of Government Relations. “Autism Speaks joins Maine’s autism community in calling on the legislature to pass LD 1198 and join the growing number of states that have ended healthcare discrimination against children with autism.”

Most states do not require private insurance companies to cover even 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.

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

###