



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE PASSES AUTISM INSURANCE REFORM
AMENDMENT TO “AMERICA’S HEALTHY FUTURE ACT OF 2009”**

**Key Senate Committee Stands Up for Families’ Access to Insurance
Coverage of Autism Therapies**

NEW YORK, NY (September 25, 2009) -- Autism Speaks, the nation’s largest autism science and advocacy organization, today applauds the members of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee for passing **Senator Robert Menendez’s (D-NJ)**, autism insurance reform amendment to “America’s Healthy Future Act of 2009,” the Committee’s version of the overall health care reform bill. Both Senator Menendez and **Senator Max Baucus (D-MT)**, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, fought hard to get this amendment passed last night during the Committee’s markup of the bill.

The amendment will prohibit discrimination in benefits against people with autism by amending current sections of the Act to include behavioral health treatments as part of the essential benefits package.

“We are grateful to Senators Menendez, Baucus, and their Committee colleagues for passing this amendment to the health care reform bill. The legislation will ensure that families dealing with autism will be a part of larger health care reform,” said Bob Wright, co-founder of Autism Speaks. “Short of finding a cure for autism, there is nothing that can have a more significant impact on the lives of people with autism and those who love them than putting an end to insurance discrimination.”

The next step in the process will be for both the House and Senate to complete their separate work on health care reform. Then the two bills must go through a conference committee before reaching the President’s desk to be signed into law.

“It is now highly likely that any health care reform bill which ultimately reaches the President’s desk will end autism insurance discrimination by including the requirement that all health insurance policies cover behavioral health treatments,” said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks vice president of government relations. “We are grateful that the U.S. Congress has recognized that any health care reform bill that does not end autism insurance discrimination is unacceptable.”

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, RAND Corporation and the New York Presbyterian Medical Center. 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. In 2008, Suzanne and Bob were named to the Heroes and Pioneers, *Time 100* list of most influential people in the world for their commitment to global autism advocacy.

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