



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 JOINS MISSOURI PARENTS AND AUTISM ADVOCATES IN
DENOUNCING INSURANCE INDUSTRY CLAIMS**

**Coventry Insurance initiates a campaign of misinformation to prevent Missouri's
families' access to healthcare coverage**

NEW YORK, NY (April 20, 2009) – Autism Speaks, the nation's largest autism advocacy organization, today asked Missouri legislators to admonish Coventry Health Care of Kansas for its deceptive tactics and absurd claims that attempt to disparage legislation that would end private insurance companies' long-standing practice of discrimination against children with autism, and to resolve to support Senate Bill 167/House Bill 357.

A recent release put out by Coventry Health Care of Kansas Inc. to business owners in the Missouri warned that passage of SB 167/HB 357 "could force average premiums up as much as 2.5% to 3%". However, the licensed Actuarial Consulting practice of Oliver Wyman, an international consulting firm, has put the actual increase at 0.76% per policy holder, far less than Coventry claims (view this report on www.AutismVotes.org). In releasing these numbers, Coventry provides no data and even dismisses their own industry's findings. Specifically, the Council for Affordable Health Insurance's (CAHI) March 2009 study found the following: "CAHI's actuarial working team estimates that an autism mandate increases the cost of health insurance by about 1 percent".

The Coventry release also alleges that the autism therapies that SB 167/HB 357 seeks to require coverage for are educational in nature, rather than medical. Autism is a medical condition. It is diagnosed by a medical doctor, not a school principal. SB 167/HB 357 will give Missouri families access to the medically-necessary, evidence-based autism treatments that their children need. Speech therapy, occupational therapy, and ABA therapy are all treatments that are prescribed by licensed physicians or licensed psychologists for the treatment of autism. The obligation of the educational system is not to treat a disorder, but to accommodate the child with a disorder and facilitate their ability to learn in an educational environment.

"Promotion of these ridiculous estimates, even in the face of conflicting data from their own trade organization, is being used to tap into people's fears and vulnerabilities," said Elizabeth Emken, Vice President of Government Relations for Autism Speaks. "The forces that oppose access to healthcare coverage for these children will clearly go to any lengths, including spreading damaging misinformation, to win this battle."

“Coventry Health Care of Kansas has knowingly misled legislators by choosing to ignore professional actuarial work, including the work of their own industry organization, CAHI. Misrepresentation and conjecture hurts families, shifts costs onto school systems, and encourages individual economic hardship – it doesn’t lead to real solutions,” added Emken.

To date, ten states – Montana, New Mexico, Arizona, Florida, Louisiana, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas -- have passed autism insurance reform legislation to cover essential autism treatments and services. 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.

###