



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AUTISM SPEAKS JOINS THE MONTANA AUTISM COMMUNITY
IN APPLAUDING STATE LEGISLATORS FOR PASSING AUTISM
INSURANCE LEGISLATION**

Montana Becomes the 10th State to Pass Autism Insurance Reform

NEW YORK, NY (April 9, 2009) -- Autism Speaks today joined Montana families and other autism advocacy organizations in applauding the state's legislators for passing Brandon's Bill, Senate Bill 234, which requires insurance companies to provide coverage of evidence-based, medically necessary autism therapies. The bill passed the House today in a vote of 75-24, following the March 25th passage in the State Senate, and now heads to Governor Brian Schweitzer's desk for signature into law.

The Montana bill requires insurers to cover up to \$50,000 annually for a child with autism 8 years of age or younger and \$20,000 annually for a child between the ages of 9 and 18. Coverage includes Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, which is recognized as an effective, evidence-based treatment for children with autism.

In many states, insurers explicitly exclude coverage of these therapies from policies, which places a significant financial burden on families seeking to provide their children with necessary services. Nine states – Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas – have passed similar autism insurance reform bills. Twenty-six states have introduced bills this year.

"The passage of SB 243, Brandon's Bill, will ensure that health care insurance covers the much needed treatment for autism in Montana," said State **Senator Kim Gillan**, the bill's sponsor. "This legislation will give children diagnosed with autism access to treatment and open the door to leading productive lives. As a mother and state senator, I will consider this one of the highlights of my 13 year legislative career. This was a team effort and Autism Speaks played a key, support role in helping Montanans understand the importance of early intervention and treatment for autistic children."

"With the passage of this legislation, Montana joins the ranks of states that have recognized the unfair and unreasonable burden being imposed on families of children with autism," said **Elizabeth Emken**, Autism Speaks Vice president for Government Relations. "Autism insurance reform has gained significant national momentum. The passage of Brandon's Bill comes just days after Governor Bill Richardson signed a similar bill into law in New Mexico."

“For too long, Montana’s families have been financially devastated by the lack of insurance coverage for therapies their children needed,” said **Laura Simonsen**, Autism Speaks Montana Chapter Advocacy Chair and mother of Brandon for whom “Brandon’s Bill” is named. “Our heartfelt thanks goes out to the state legislators who worked so hard in the House and Senate to get this bill passed. This is truly an historic moment for families in our state.”

Brandon’s Bill, Senate Bill 234, was sponsored by State Senator Kim Gillan (D-24) in the Montana State Senate and championed in the State House by Representative Kendall Van Dyk (D-49).

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.

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. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org.

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