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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**AUTISM SPEAKS JOINS THE NEW JERSEY AUTISM COMMUNITY IN APPLAUDING  
STATE SENATE PASSAGE OF AUTISM INSURANCE REFORM LEGISLATION**

***New Jersey S.1651 Passed by State Senate in Overwhelming 35 to 0 Vote***

**TRENTON, NJ (June 18, 2009)** – Autism Speaks today joined New Jersey families, Autism New Jersey, and other autism advocacy organizations in applauding the members of the State Senate for passing S. 1651, which requires insurance companies to provide coverage of evidence-based, medically necessary autism therapies. The bill passed the New Jersey Senate today in a vote of 35-0 and now heads back to the State Assembly for concurrence.

S. 1651 is sponsored by Senators Joseph Vitale and Loretta Weinberg in the Senate and will require insurance companies to provide coverage of autism therapies, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, for individuals under age twenty-one up to a maximum of \$36,000 per year. The Assembly version of the bill, A. 2238, was passed on May 14 and is sponsored by Speaker Joseph Roberts, Assemblywoman Joan Voss and Assemblyman Vincent Prieto. Last month, Autism Speaks Co-Founder, Bob Wright, testified at committee hearings on both the Senate and Assembly bills.

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.

“With the passage of this legislation in both the Assembly and Senate, New Jersey stands on the threshold to joining 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 this year. Legislatures across the country have introduced and passed bills that put an end to the discriminatory practices by insurance companies against children with an autism diagnosis.”

Thirteen states – Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Illinois, Indiana, Montana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas -- have enacted autism insurance reform legislation. Some two dozen other state legislatures introduced similar legislation during the 2009 session.

To learn more about Autism Votes, an initiative of Autism Speaks focused on federal and state legislative advocacy, please visit [www.autismvotes.org](http://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](http://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.

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