



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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

New Mexico Becomes the 9th State to Pass Autism Insurance Reform

NEW YORK, NY (March 20, 2009) -- Autism Speaks today joined New Mexico families and other autism advocacy organizations in applauding the state's legislators for passing Senate Bill 39, which requires insurance companies to provide coverage of evidence-based, medically necessary autism therapies. The bill passed the House today in a vote of 51-15, following unanimous passage in the State Senate, and now heads to Governor Bill Richardson's desk for signature into law.

The New Mexico bill requires insurers to cover up to \$36,000 a year for treatments and therapies, including Applied Behavior Analysis therapy for children until age nineteen, or age twenty-two if the individual is enrolled in high school. The bill also sets a maximum lifetime coverage limit of \$200,000. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is recognized as an effective, evidence-based treatment for children with autism. The law specifies that there cannot be any limit put on the number of visits to an autism service provider and that the maximum per year benefit will be adjusted annually for inflation.

"I am elated with the final passage of SB 39 today. It truly was a win for the autism community of New Mexico and the heavy lifting was done by our families living with autism 24/7. All I did was carry the bill," said **State Senator Harden**, "But this won't be my first entrance into this arena. I was thrilled to find out that the individuals who opposed the bill did so because it did not include insurance for the public sector. I am excited and encouraged to have their support to expand this coverage during the session next year."

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. Eight states – Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas – have passed similar autism insurance reform bills. Twenty-four states have introduced bills this year, and New Mexico is the first to pass.

"With the passage of this legislation, New Mexico 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. Legislatures across the country are introducing and passing bills that put an end to the discriminatory practices by insurance companies against children with an autism diagnosis.”

The passage of this legislation was the result of a grassroots advocacy effort led by hundreds of committed families with the support of local and national advocacy organizations.

“For too long, New Mexico’s families have been financially devastated by the lack of insurance coverage for therapies their children needed,” said **Gay Finlayson**, autism advocate and mother of two adults with autism. “It’s not everyday that the autism community gets a win in the fight to improve our children’s lives. This is truly an historic moment for families in our state who worked so hard to get this bill passed.”

Senate Bill 39 was sponsored by State Senator Clinton D. Harden (R-7) in the New Mexico State Senate. A similar bill, House Bill 155, was introduced by State Representative Joni Marie Gutierrez (D-33).

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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