



## **R.I. News Digest:**

**Friday, August 12, 2011**

### **Autism bill signed**

PROVIDENCE — Governor Chafee on Thursday morning held a ceremonial signing at the State House for legislation requiring insurers to provide coverage for the screening, diagnosis and treatment of autism.

He was joined by families of and advocates for people with autism, as well as state lawmakers, including Rep. Peter Palumbo, D-Cranston, and Sen. Edward O'Neill, I-Lincoln, the legislation's primary sponsors.

The legislation — H5275 and S107 — is meant to help alleviate the financial strain faced by parents of children with autism spectrum disorders, who often cannot afford early and intensive behavioral therapies that advocates say are effective in helping children to talk and better relate to other people and their environments.

For the most severely affected children, these treatments can cost \$50,000 a year or more, families and advocates have said.

The new state law requires health insurers to cover up to \$32,000 a year in autism diagnosis and treatment for children, up until their 15th birthdays. Among the treatments required to be covered are behavioral therapies.

Rhode Island became the 27th state to mandate coverage for autism when Chafee officially signed it into law at the end of June.

Autism Speaks, a national nonprofit organization that has lobbied heavily for passage of autism-insurance mandates across the country, has said Rhode Island's mandate would add \$1.48 a month to the cost of an individual insurance premium.

An average of 1 in 110 children in the United States is diagnosed with autism, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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