

From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**VIRGINIA FAMILIES RALLY AT CAPITOL TO CALL FOR  
AN END TO HEALTHCARE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST  
CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

***House Bill 1588 Requires Insurance Companies to Provide Coverage of  
Medically Necessary, Evidence-Based Autism Services***

**RICHMOND, VA (January 15, 2009)** -- This morning Autism Speaks joined parents of children with autism and other advocates at a rally in support of House Bill 1588, which was introduced yesterday at the start of the General Assembly's 2009 session. The bill would end insurers' discriminatory policies that deny coverage of key treatments for children with autism. The rally included speeches by the bill's patrons, other supportive Delegates, as well as members of the grassroots community. Judith Ursitti, Regional Director of State Advocacy Relations, spoke on behalf of Autism Speaks.

Sponsored by Delegate Robert Marshall (R-13) and Delegate David Poisson (D-32), HB 1588 seeks to require private health insurance companies to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorder for individuals under the age of 21. Coverage would be subject to an inflation adjusted maximum benefit of \$36,000 annually. The bill, which applies only to fully-funded health plans governed by state, includes diagnosis and coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, the most widely accepted, evidence-based autism therapy. Eight states have already passed similar autism insurance reform legislation. In November, every elected official on the governor's Mandated Benefits Commission voted to advance the bill to this year's General Assembly.

Autism affects more than 7,000 students in Virginia. This number grew by 400% between 1998 and 2006. Families affected by autism are often forced to pay out-of-pocket for medically necessary autism therapies, which can easily cost over \$50,000 per year. Many families in Virginia and across the country are literally going broke trying to provide their children with the treatments they need and deserve.

"The solution for helping these families must come through legislative action," said **Elizabeth Emken, Vice President of Government Relations for Autism Speaks**. "We thank Delegates Marshall and Poisson for introducing HB 1588 and call on the Virginia General Assembly to pass this bill and join the growing number of states that have ended healthcare discrimination against children with autism."

“Introducing this bill and doing something that will help the thousands of Virginia families whose children are affected by autism is the greatest reward a legislator can know,” said **Delegate Robert Marshall**. “This is why I am here.”

"Admittedly, in the near term, mandating this coverage could add slightly to the cost of health insurance in Virginia. But whatever the cost, and no one can say for certain what it will be, it pales by comparison with what it will be if we fail to invest now in early intervention services. Autistic children who receive insufficient treatment can sometimes end up being institutionalized at taxpayer expense, at costs in the millions for each patient," said **Delegate David E. Poisson**.

HB 1588 has been referred to the Committee on Commerce and Labor. Please visit [www.AutismVotes.org/Virginia](http://www.AutismVotes.org/Virginia) for more information.

### **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 dedicated to increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders, to funding research into the causes, prevention and treatments for autism, and to advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. It 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. Autism Speaks merged with both the National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR) and Cure Autism Now (CAN), bringing together the nation's three leading autism advocacy organizations. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org).

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