



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Craig M. Johnson

Senator Johnson: Historic Legislation to Help the Treatment of Autism Passes Senate

CRAIG M. JOHNSON June 27, 2010

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New York To Have Among Strongest Laws in the Country

The State Senate last week passed groundbreaking legislation that will help protect children who are diagnosed with Autism and save their families thousands of dollars a year, Senator Craig M. Johnson, (D-Nassau), announced.

The legislation (S.7000B) will establish a national model requiring health insurers to cover the screening diagnosis, and treatment of an Autism Spectrum Disorder, which will close a significant gap in insurance coverage for individuals with Autism.

“Every day I hear the horror stories from Long Island families who have re-mortgaged their homes and taken second and third jobs in order to pay for the Autism-related treatments that their children need,” said Senator Johnson.

“Insurance companies are supposed to be there to help families during times of crisis. With this legislation, we are ensuring that these companies live up to their responsibility.”

A video of Senator Johnson's floor remarks on this legislation can be viewed at www.cjohnson.nysenate.gov.

The current law does not provide clarity to consumers, or insurers as to the scope of required coverage. The legislative change would update the definition of an Autism Spectrum Disorder, and tell insurers exactly what must be covered. In addition, the Commissioner of Health is now given the responsibility of setting regulations identifying treatment and therapy options for Autism coverage.

The bill is expected to pass the Assembly before the end of the Legislative session.

“People often lament the political gridlock in Albany, but this legislation is an important reminder of what our elected officials can and will do to help New York’s families,” said Bob Wright, co-founder of Autism Speaks. “Families here

and around the country are literally going broke trying to give children the therapies they need and deserve to meet their full potential. It's time that we eliminate this unfair burden and end insurers' blatant discrimination against children with Autism in every state in America."

The Centers for Disease Control have now estimated that the number of children with Autism is 1 in 110 nationwide, up from previous estimates of 1 in 150. In New York State, those numbers increase to close to 1 in 90 affected by Autism, with the Autism rate for children increasing by almost 15-percent per year.

Twenty states have previously passed legislation covering Autism. New York will become the 21st with one of the strongest laws among them, covering individuals for life while not imposing a financial cap. Only evidence-based and clinically proven treatments are to be covered.

"The passage of S.7000B is an important step toward coverage of evidence-based Autism treatment for New York families who have historically been discriminated against by the very health plans to which they pay premiums," said Judith Ursitti, Autism Speaks regional director of state advocacy relations.

Studies show that health services targeted to address the medical complications and co-morbidities of Autism can significantly improve physical and social functioning of children. If Autistic children receive intensive early evidence based psycho/social and medical treatment, they will have a higher level of functionality and are much less likely to need life-long support services, which will save the taxpayer money. In fact, cost analyses show that every dollar spent on early treatment will save \$5 to \$7 in long-term costs.

"The Autism Science Foundation is proud to support S.7000B, which will enable thousands of New York families to receive the benefit of evidence based, clinically proven interventions and treatments for autism spectrum disorders, like Applied Behavior Analysis therapy (ABA), as well as screening and diagnostic services" said Alison Singer, President of the Autism Science Foundation. "Research has shown that evidence-based intensive behavioral therapies like ABA can result in significant improvement in the cognition, communication and well-being of people with autism spectrum disorder."

"We enthusiastically support efforts to bring equity in insurance coverage to children and adults who are challenged by autism and autism spectrum disorder." said Dr. Henry Schaeffer, Chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics, District II, New York State. "The more than 5,000 pediatricians across the state who provide health care to more than 4 million children stand with you in your work to assure that all children and families, no matter what their physical, psychological or intellectual challenges, can get the health care they need to live productive and healthy lives."

“The Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Association celebrates the New York State Senate’s actions in passing S.7000B and affording autistic individuals access to quality health care,” said Patricia R. Schissel, LMSW, President, AHA Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism.