



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kevin S. Parker

## Senator Parker Stands Up for Individuals Affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder

KEVIN S. PARKER April 17, 2013

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### **Senator Parker Stands Up for Individuals Affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder**

#### **Bi-Partisan Legislative Package Addresses the Needs of the Developmentally Disabled**

(Brooklyn, NY) Today, Senator Kevin Parker (D-21) proposed a legislative package consisting of six bills that will significantly enhance services to individuals affected by autism. This package is introduced at a time of great need in light of the recent cuts made to programs for

the developmentally disabled. "In honor of National Autism Awareness Month this April, I believe this is the opportune time to pass a comprehensive legislative package that addresses the needs of individuals affected by autism spectrum disorders," says Senator Parker.

"We commend Senator Parker's leadership in advocating for the vital services and rights of individuals with autism and their families" says Dr. Joshua Weinstein, President of Shema Kolainu – Hear Our Voices, School and Center for Children with Autism.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are the fastest growing developmental disability in the United States. Most recently, the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network reported that 1 in 88 children had an ASD (based on children who were 8 years old in 2008). This means that the estimated prevalence of ASDs increased 23% during 2006 to 2008 and 78% during 2002 to 2008.

Legislation in this proposed package includes:

- Establishing a registry to help locate individuals with autism, Alzheimer's and dementia in the event they go missing (S.4557/A.3545 - Parker/Weisenberg)
- Establishing a program of tiered eligibility for services offered by OPWDD for persons with learning disabilities and other complex neurological impairments (S.989 – Parker/Abinanti)
- Allowing therapy dogs used for disabilities such as ASDs to enter public places and public transportation (S.2831 – Parker/Abinanti)
- Defining a bill of rights for persons with autism or autism spectrum disorders (S.481/A.1272 - Kennedy/Gunther)
- Including the definition of autism and ASDs in the Mental Hygiene Law (S.3044/A.1633 - Carlucci/Abinanti)

- Providing for a tax credit for a certain amount of money expended on the care of a qualifying disabled child including children with ASDs (S.2139/A.4409 - Lanza/Cusick).

"Individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder are among the most vulnerable in our population. It is our responsibility to do all that we can to protect and provide for these persons. The proposed legislation will go a long way in providing the support and services that are needed by these individuals and their caregivers. I am excited about the long-term benefits of the proposed package and as a service provider I look forward to additional legislation that will transform the lives of the families that I serve," says Mr. Ray Knights of Elmy's Special Services.

The 2013-14 New York State budget cut \$90 million in state funding to agencies that serve individuals with developmental disabilities. Advocates project that these cuts will make it extremely difficult to deliver services to one of our most vulnerable populations. "We must make sure that kids who need help get help and are not excluded because of artificial criteria dictated by tight budgets," said Assemblyman Abinanti, Assembly sponsor of three of the six bills featured in this package.

The bills in this package are intended to provide much needed services to individuals affected by ASD. "The package includes comprehensive programs that curtail the fast-paced growth of these disabilities. I am proud to introduce a package including bi-partisan legislation that will improve services to some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state," says Parker. "I look forward to working with all of my colleagues to pass this legislative package," he concluded.

### **About Senator Kevin Parker**

Senator Kevin S. Parker is intimately familiar with the needs of his ethnically diverse community in the heart of Brooklyn that consists of 318,000 constituents in Flatbush, East

Flatbush, Midwood, Ditmas Park, Kensington, Windsor Terrace, and Park Slope. He is the Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee, Assistant Democratic Leader for Intergovernmental Affairs, and Chair of the Democratic Task Force on New Americans.