

State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



Christopher G. Donovan
Speaker of the House

301

**TO: Representative Steve Fontana, Chair of the Insurance Committee
Senator Joseph Crisco, Chair of the Insurance Committee**

FROM: Speaker of the House Christopher Donovan

DATE: February 5, 2009 – Insurance Committee Public Hearing

RE: Testimony in Support of Proposed Senate Bill 301

Good afternoon Chairman Fontana, Chairman Crisco and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity today to express my strong support for Proposed Senate Bill 301, *An Act Concerning Health Insurance Coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

This bill will provide many Connecticut families who have children with autism spectrum disorders with access to life-changing treatments. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in 150 eight-year-olds in the United States had an Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis in 2007. While there is no cure for autism, early detection and treatment can greatly improve symptoms, development and outcomes.

Despite its prevalence, many families do not have access to the therapies or even the diagnoses they need to obtain treatment. Even families with good health insurance are being discriminated against because they have a child with a disability. Connecticut families are mortgaging their houses and bankrupting themselves to pay for effective autism treatments or tragically foregoing these therapies.

Overtime, covering these early treatments will pay for themselves. Studies show that applied behavioral analysis and the other therapies covered by this bill can transform the lives of children with autism and their families, in some cases even allowing them to participate in mainstream classes with little assistance. Overall special education and adult service costs are reduced and people with autism can participate in the workforce. Moreover, their families are more economically productive because they can spend their time earning income

In the last two years, 7 states – Pennsylvania, Louisiana, South Carolina, Arizona, Indiana, Florida and Texas have all mandated full insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism, including behavior therapy.

At the press conference Senator Looney and I held last week, many of us had the privilege of meeting the Latimer family. Mrs. Latimer has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (an autism spectrum disorder) and both her children are living with autism. The Latimers have insurance, but it covers so little of the therapies and medications the family needs, that living in Connecticut is no longer affordable. The Latimers will be moving to Texas, which requires coverage for the treatments they need.

I hope you will join me in supporting this important legislation. Raising a child with autism is a challenge that so many of our constituents face. They should not also have to struggle with the costs of their treatment.

Thank you for your time.