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Testimony in SUPPORT OF Senate Bill 974, Health Insurance Coverage for Alternative Therapies for Autism: Mandate. February 24, 2011

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On behalf of the thousands of families living with autism here in Connecticut, I am testifying in SUPPORT of Senate bill 974, Health Insurance Coverage for Alternative Therapies for Autism.

While there are many things we DO NOT know about autism, there is one thing that we DO know. Autism affects each individual very differently. We can use the metaphor of a piece of swiss cheese: each piece of swiss cheese is cheese with holes in it. However, each piece has the holes in a different spot. It is still swiss cheese. Same with autism. The core deficits of autism – impairments in communication, socialization and behavior – manifest themselves uniquely in each individual affected by an autism spectrum disorder. Due to this fact, there are a wide variety of interventions and therapeutic approaches that have been developed to treat the range of symptoms expressed. There is no one intervention or approach that works in all cases. There is no “one size fits all”.

Last year, the CT legislature made an important inroad in helping our autism community by mandating that insurance companies cover behavioral therapies for treating autism. While this legislation provided needed resources for many families, it was only one step on the road. For many individuals with autism, behavioral therapies are the appropriate choice. For others, however, different choices are more effective. Without Senate Bill 974, families choices may be limited to that covered by insurance, rather than the choice of the most effective treatment for their family member. We wouldn't allow insurance companies to cover only one type of antibiotic when we know that different bacteria react differently to each medication. Why would we do the same for autism?

At ASCONN, our approach is one of an “open options” policy. We do not advocate any one therapy or approach to autism as we know there is no one right answer. We support families and help them to make informed, educated choices for themselves, their families and their loved ones with autism. This bill will go a long way towards making those choices a reality for many families.

Thank you for your time.