



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian X. Foley

## **Senator Foley Helps Families Coping with Autism**

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ISSUE:

- [Families](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Children](#)

Senator Brian X. Foley (D – Blue Point) co-sponsored legislation that will protect children with autism. Senate Bill 7000-B, which passed the senate yesterday, will establish a national model requiring health care coverage for autism. This will save families thousands of dollars a year.

The legislation requires that health insurers cover the screening, diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders. This will close a significant gap in insurance coverage for families coping with autism. The legislation includes an update of the definition of autism spectrum disorders and gives the Commissioner of Health the responsibility to set regulations identifying treatment and therapy options for autism coverage. Only evidence-based and clinically proven treatments will be covered.

“Families of children with autism spectrum disorders are constantly looking for ways to help their children to better experience the world and to receive the treatment necessary to improve their quality of life,” said Senator Foley. “Too often, these families have difficulty accessing these services and treatment programs because they cannot afford to pay for it out of their own pockets. Requiring insurance companies to cover the cost of these treatments will help to ease the burden on many of the families who are living with this disease.”

“This law would restore the voice of those indirectly affected by autism,” said Senator Neil D. Breslin (D – Albany), Chair of the Insurance Committee and sponsor of the bill. “Many families paying out-of-pocket for autism treatments risk their homes and the educations of their unaffected children, mortgaging their entire futures for something that should be covered by basic health insurance.”

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) now estimate that the number of children with autism is 1 in 110, up from previous estimates of 1 in 150. In New York, it is estimated that 1 in 90 children are affected by autism. The rate of autism is increasing by nearly 15% per year in New York alone.

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.

Twenty states have previously passed legislation covering autism. New York would become the twenty-first state and would have one of the strongest laws by providing coverage for individuals for life without imposing a financial cap.