



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

New York Legislature Passes Landmark Bill Extending Healthcare Coverage for Autistic Patients

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Oppenheimer co-sponsored bill now awaits Governor's approval

The New York State Legislature passed legislation protecting families and children affected by autism spectrum disorders from exorbitant healthcare costs. Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) was a key co-sponsor of the legislation (S7000B), which passed the Senate on June 9th, with unanimous, bipartisan support.

Earlier this week, the Assembly passed the bill, which will now be sent to the Governor for his approval.

The bill would amend existing insurance and public health laws to require health insurance providers to cover the screening, diagnosis, and treatment of autism spectrum disorders. It mandates that policies provide coverage for autistic individuals throughout their lifetimes with no financial cap. The bill also provides clarity to consumers and insurers as to the extent of medical coverage. The State Commissioner of Health, in consultation with the Superintendent of Insurance and the Commissioners of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, would be responsible for identifying covered treatment and therapy options.

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that one in 110 children nationwide are autistic -- a 57 percent increase in prevalence from 2002 to 2006 alone. Without proper coverage, families pay thousands of dollars per month for treatment and therapy. Children whose families do not have the means to finance this level of medical care often go untreated. Extending coverage and eliminating age and financial caps will allow families throughout the state to provide the necessary care for their children, without fear of incurring crippling financial debt.

“Providing insurance parity for the many individuals and families affected by autism is not only the right thing to do, but also the fiscally prudent course of action,” said Senator Oppenheimer. Studies have shown that if children receive intensive early psychological, social, and medical treatment, they will have a higher level of functionality and are less likely to need lifelong state-funded support services. Cost analyses calculate that every dollar spent on early treatment will save \$5-\$7 in long-term health care costs.

“This bill enables families to provide necessary care for their autistic child at a fraction of the cost – for both the taxpayer and the affected families,” remarked Senator Oppenheimer. “Autism is a medical condition and should not be a barrier to health insurance coverage for thousands of New Yorkers. I urge Governor Paterson to enact it promptly into law.”