



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Landmark Legislation on Autism

This week I write to you about a subject that touches the lives of just about everyone in some way: autism. Perhaps you know a child who suffers from it and the family who struggles with it. Maybe you don't know anyone personally but admire the local family you see about town who determinedly shares a special love with their autistic child. Or, perhaps it is your child and your family. If so, you already know that one in every 110 children is

diagnosed to be within the autism spectrum and while there is debate over diagnostic criteria, we know that more and more of our children are locked in this invisible prison.

Nobody can explain for certain why there has been such a surge in recent years but it's clear that the number of affected children is overwhelming and that in 20 years our nation will have its hands full in finding ways to care for them. For now, it is their families – our neighbors – who have their hands full. They should not be ignored.

In that light, I have the pleasure of bringing some good news to my neighbors. Last week, the Senate passed a bill that I co-sponsored with Senator Charles Fuschillo. This legislation allows individuals with autism disorders to finally receive insurance coverage for screening, diagnosis and treatment. It deals directly with the insurance companies' refusal to cover these costs and may ultimately save many autism families from financial ruin. It will, in some measure, alleviate at least some of the pressures they face and it awaits only the Governor's signature to be enacted into law.

We all know these have been hard times, not only for our state government but for everyone who lives here. Even so, I'm sure you will agree that it is simply not acceptable that children with autism be denied necessary treatment. It is not tolerable that we have hundreds of families forced to make painful decisions between paying their mortgages or therapy for their children in need. I believe that even given all of our current problems, the good people of this state want to help.

So please share this news with those you know and love but remember that it is only one part of what is needed. Take a moment to thank and encourage those who work tirelessly to raise autism awareness. Without them, these victories would not be possible. And please, take a moment to care for the caretakers. The families who struggle with autism cannot do it alone. Good neighbors and good friends who lend a hand or even an ear are invaluable.

As always, I thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Senator.