



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

## Senator Kennedy Commemorates April as Autism Awareness Month, Pushes for New Protections for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY April 3, 2013

| ISSUE: **FAMILIES, HEALTH**



*Kennedy Urges Awareness, Advocacy and Understanding of Autism and its Effects.*

*Push continues to pass Kennedy's bill to enact a bill of rights for people with autism spectrum disorders.*

BUFFALO, N.Y. – In recognizing April as Autism Awareness Month, Senator Tim Kennedy, D-Buffalo, is encouraging Western New Yorkers to get engaged in the effort to spread further

awareness of autism and its effects on children, adults and their families. Kennedy has also been pushing for several legislative initiatives to strengthen the state's protections and support for people with autism spectrum disorders and their families.

Kennedy is urging his colleagues to support legislation he introduced to help ensure families can gain access to high-quality care and treatment by clearly defining autism in state law and enacting [a bill of rights for people with autism or autism spectrum disorders](#).

"As an occupational therapist who has worked with children with autism spectrum disorders, I understand the pressure and strain this disorder puts on the individual diagnosed and their family. It's an emotional strain and a stress on their finances. The state must step up its efforts to provide relief and support to people with autism and their families," Kennedy said. "Our legislation will help New York families secure fundamental rights to treatment, information, research and insurance coverage for autism spectrum disorders. These families need our help, and our state should be there for them."

The bill of rights for persons with autism or autism spectrum disorders (S.481) would ensure equitable insurance coverage. It also seeks to extend important rights including increased funding of autism research, access to a comprehensive continuum of care, treatment within a coordinated system of agencies, receipt of care in-home and at treatment centers located near the patient's residence, family-driven and patient-focused treatment by highly qualified professionals, and access to all information necessary facilitate informed consent.

Kennedy has also introduced [legislation \(S.532\) to clearly define autism and autism spectrum disorders in state law](#). This would help ensure no families are denied the screenings and treatment a child or family member with autism may need.

“Autism affects an increasing number of New Yorkers, yet it can be very difficult to fully understand,” Kennedy said. “New York State must increase the ability of parents and caregivers to properly identify the signs and give children and adults with autism the high-quality treatment they deserve.”

Autism is a neural development disorder. Indicators of the disorder include impaired social interaction and communication, as well as restricted and repetitive behavior. Just three decades ago, according to the Centers for Disease Control, only 3.5 children out of every 10,000 were diagnosed with autism. However, more recent rates indicate 1 in every 50 children are affected.

Recognizing early signs of autism is vital to helping children and their parents understand the disorder and how to effectively take action. Research has indicated that the earlier a child is diagnosed, the sooner he or she can benefit from a specialized approach to treatment and education.

“Children with autism deserve the chance to realize their dreams and potential,” Kennedy added. “We’ve made progress, but there’s more work ahead. We need to spread further awareness of the impact of autism and sign into law new protections for people with autism.”

Earlier this year, Kennedy cosponsored [a Senate resolution to designate April 2013 as Autism Spectrum Disorders Awareness Month in New York State](#). The first National Autism Awareness Month happened in the 1970s when the National Autism Society designated April to highlight the growing need for awareness about autism.

For more information about autism, visit <http://www.autism-society.org>, <http://www.autismspeaks.org/>, or [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html).

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*Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the town of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.*