



Recommendations from the Autism Panel

JEFFERSON CITY — Over the past six months, I have had the great opportunity to work with some dedicated folks and hear from some dedicated parents, health professionals, and educators who deal with an epidemic that seems to be growing larger in this country every day... the number of those affected by autism. Now, after countless hours of testimony and debate about how this state can be a leader in dealing with this issue, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism, which I had the privilege to chair, has put together a list of 36 recommendations to help Missouri get its hands around autism.

To give you some perspective on how big this problem is, one out of every 150 children in this country is affected by some form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) — a group of complex neurobiological brain disorders that present differing degrees of impairment in communication skills, social interactions, and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, among other behavioral and physiological symptoms. The number of children affected is more than AIDS, juvenile diabetes, and cancer combined.

First and foremost, the group is recommending the formation of a Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The commission would advise and make recommendations to the governor, General Assembly, and relevant state agencies regarding matters concerning all ASD services, including healthcare, education, and other adult and adolescent services. I have already filed [Senate Bill 768](#) to help make that panel a reality. Other recommendations come in several core areas including: a comprehensive, coordinated system of care; adult services; healthcare and developmental support; education; and increased training for all parties involved with ASD.

The Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism heard from a group of tireless individuals who want to find the best way for this state not only to deal with ASD but also for Missouri to become a leader in its efforts. I appreciate the hard work and dedication of the panel members and all the parents and experts who came in and helped us put together our recommendations. I promise that the report they have helped write won't just gather dust on a shelf. It is time we put these plans into action.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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