



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 9, 2008

General Assembly Says ‘Yes’ to State Autism Commission
Senators’ Bill Improves Services & Empowers Families Living with Autism

JEFFERSON CITY — The General Assembly this week gave final approval to a bill designed to benefit Missourians living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families with the creation of the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The Missouri House resoundingly endorsed Senate Bill 768, sponsored by Sen. Scott T. Rupp, R-Wentzville, and co-sponsored by Senate Leader Mike Gibbons, R-Kirkwood. The proposal now heads to the governor’s desk to be signed into law.

The newly created commission will advise the governor, members of the General Assembly, and state agencies; and develop a statewide comprehensive plan for an integrated system of training, treatment and services for individuals of all ages with ASD.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, autism strikes one out of 150 children in this country — which is more than AIDS, juvenile diabetes, and cancer, combined.

“This is another important step in our commitment to improving the quality of life for Missourians of all ages who are living with autism,” Rupp said. “We are committed to doing everything we can to empower those individuals and their families and intend to become a leader in the 21st Century in adopting the best practices in training, research and family supports.”

Last year, the Legislature more than doubled funding for autism diagnosis and treatment, helping reduce the waitlist for services. Lawmakers approved a \$7.4 million increase for autism services in this year's budget.

The bill was a result of recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism formed last year by Gibbons and chaired by Rupp. The 16-person panel consisted of lawmakers, parents, doctors, health officials and educators and was charged with creating a roadmap for improving state services and empowering families living with autism. Their report was presented in December and can be viewed online at www.senate.mo.gov/autism.

"We promised to turn the Blue Ribbon Panel’s recommendations into reality and we have," Gibbons said. "We want to empower families living with autism and this commission will advise government on how to implement the best practice models of the ideas presented by the panel."

The office of Autism Services is also authorized by statute in the bill. The office will serve as an entry point to help direct families to diagnosis and care services, making it easier for families to navigate the system and more quickly find the resources they need.

###