



Office of  
**Jason Crowell** State  
Senator

The Crowell Connection



**Senator Jason Crowell – Serving Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Mississippi, Perry, and Scott Counties.**

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## Autism Awareness

### *Helping Missouri Families Affected by Autism*

April is Autism Awareness month, a time to increase understanding and discuss treatment of this disorder. Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities defined by significant impairments in social interaction and communication and the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. There are more than 32,000 Missourians who have been diagnosed with autism, and there is much we can do to help the growing number of children and families who are impacted. Making sure that research and treatment is available throughout Missouri is vital, and I am working to make sure tomorrow is better than today for children with autism.



This summer, the Senate formed a Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism that traveled the state and held meetings with experts and the public in order to increase understanding of autism and find ways to better address issues in Missouri. One such meeting was held in Cape Girardeau where we heard from residents throughout Southeast Missouri who have been affected by autism. Kim and John Daniel, for example, are raising twin daughters who have been diagnosed with autism. Kim praised the importance of early diagnosis and explained to the panel that early intervention is a wise investment of our state. Mary Cox's 36-year-old son was diagnosed with autism at age 16, and spoke to the panel about the importance of addressing the adult autistic population. These are just some of the people in our community who face the realities of autism every day.

Last year, we passed legislation to create funds for a variety of statewide projects by the partial sale of the state loan authority's assets. The Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative Projects included \$2.638

million for a new autism center at Southeast Missouri State University. This center will provide diagnosis, treatment, education, and research in autism for patients in Southeast Missouri. The fiscal year 2009 budget as it currently stands contains \$7.4 million in autism funding, which includes an additional \$480,000 for the Southeast Missouri Autism Center. The FY 2009 budget also currently contains \$200,000 for the Tailor Institute in Cape Girardeau, an organization that works with those who have been diagnosed with autism on the high functioning spectrum, allowing them to reach their full potential. Living independently and obtaining employment are just some of the goals that can be achieved through the Tailor Institute's work. We have been able to secure this funding for their important work since 2006.

Another way we are addressing autism is through Senate Bill 768, a bill that is the result of several recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism. The measure creates a statewide commission on autism spectrum disorders (ASD), which would advise and make recommendations to the governor, General Assembly and state agencies regarding matters concerning all state levels of ASD services. In addition, the commission would develop a comprehensive state plan that focuses on enhancing resources required to provide a full complement of ASD services necessary in the state. The Missouri Department of Mental Health would provide technical and administrative support requested by the commission.



According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, one out of every 166 births shows signs of an autism spectrum disorder. This month, I hope you will join me in taking time to reflect on the families in our community who spend every day dealing with this disorder and do your best to contribute to the identification, research, and treatment of autism.

### **Contact Me**

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: [jcrowell@senate.mo.gov](mailto:jcrowell@senate.mo.gov) or visit me on the web at <http://www.senate.mo.gov/crowell>.

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