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## Rallies Drawing Attention to Need for Autism Insurance Reform

JEFFERSON CITY — On Sept. 20, a crowd of more than 2,000 gathered at T.R. Hughes ball park in O’Fallon to kick off a series of *Autism Insurance Reform Rallies* scheduled across the state. Many Missourians across the state are expected to rally in the coming weeks to show their support for passing legislation to ensure insurance coverage for Missouri families affected by autism — one of our state’s — and nation’s — most vital and urgent needs.

My colleague, Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Glendale, and I are lead sponsors of autism insurance reform in Missouri and are speaking at this series of free family events to help raise autism awareness and the need for common sense insurance coverage in Missouri. The first event in O’Fallon had a fantastic turnout, with more than 35 autism-related groups in attendance and lots of families living with autism, including some who traveled a great distance. There were also several locally-based sports celebrities, including Darryl Strawberry, Lou Brock, Kerry Robinson, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, John Mabry and Roland Williams, who offered their support for passing legislation so Missouri families can receive insurance coverage for autism.

While it was an upbeat gathering of families, friends, professionals, and other autism advocates, the personal stories from those living with autism were quite emotional and accentuated the all-important need to help families, many of whom are struggling to afford the early intervention and crucial care their child desperately needs. Senator Schmitt’s five-year-old son has autism, and he shared his own moving story of how his family knows firsthand the emotional, physical and financial costs associated with having a child with autism. His story is just one of many that can be echoed across the country, as autism strikes 1 in 150 children — more than AIDS, juvenile diabetes and cancer, combined. Autism is also among the top 10 most common neurobiological disorders, yet private insurance provides coverage for all, EXCEPT autism.

I am amazed at the tremendous support we are receiving for this much-needed legislation, and I believe we will continue to witness this as large turnouts are expected for three additional autism insurance reform rallies. The rallies, which are open to the public, will take place in St. Joseph, Kansas City and Springfield during the first weekend in October at the following locations:

**St. Joseph: Friday, October 2, 6 p.m.**

Inside the East Hills Shopping Center, located at the intersection of Belt Highway and Frederick Ave. (three blocks west of Interstate 29 at Exit 47).

**Kansas City: Saturday, October 3, 10:30 a.m.**

University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Nursing, 2464 Charlotte (located at 25<sup>th</sup> and Charlotte near Crown Center, east of Children’s Mercy Hospital).

**Springfield: Saturday, October 3, 4:45 p.m.**

Burrell Autism Center, 1300 E. Bradford Parkway, Springfield, 4:45 p.m. (Event begins at 3:30 p.m. with family activities followed by a 4:15 p.m. children’s parade).

For more information on these upcoming events, or to R.S.V.P., you can visit [www.moautismbill.com](http://www.moautismbill.com) or contact my office toll-free at (866) 271-2844.

As always, if you have any 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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