



Column For Week of: April 20, 2009

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## Legislation Affecting Children in Missouri

As a legislator, my job is to work for every citizen in my district, from senior citizens to the youngest Missourians. This week, we discussed legislation dealing with children in foster care and children diagnosed with autism. I support these bills because I know they are designed to help these children live full and happy lives.

We gave initial approval to a bill this week that would help children involved in the foster care system. [House Bill 154](#) would require the state to make diligent efforts to locate the grandparents of a child needing emergency placement. The bill also specifies that the grandparents be given first consideration for foster child placement. I also successfully amended a provision modeled after a piece of legislation I sponsored this year ([Senate Bill 388](#)). The measure requires that a child's opinions about placement be considered as a factor in placement, as long as it is appropriate based on their age and maturity level. It is important to me that we take these children's concerns into consideration during placement because their insight on their own situation is a valuable tool in making these important decisions.

The Senate also gave final approval to [Senate Bill 167](#), which helps children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This developmental disability is marked by significant impairments in social interaction and communication, as well as the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. Treatment is key when making sure these individuals have the best quality of life, but it is also expensive for struggling families. The legislation would require insurance companies that issue or renew health benefit plans to provide coverage for

diagnosis and treatment of individuals with autism up to age 18. The legislation would also prevent health carriers from refusing to issue or renew coverage based solely on the fact that an individual is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. This is an important bill that ensures children with ASD will have access to the care they need.

It doesn't matter whether you are a parent or work with children regularly, we are all impacted by the experiences children have during their most critical years. These bills can make a difference for these children and lead to a better future for our state.

### **Contact Me**

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to call me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2108. You can also write to the address listed below.

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