



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

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Autism Awareness Month

Focusing on Helping those with Autism

Making sure that research and treatment is available for those with autism-related disorders in Missouri is important. April is Autism Awareness Month, and I thought this would be a good time to highlight some of the accomplishments we have made as well as some of the work we are still doing to help families dealing with autism.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of developmental disabilities defined by significant impairments in social interaction and communication, as well as 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.

In 2007, we passed legislation that included \$2.638 million for a new Southeast Missouri Autism Center. The last fiscal year's budget included an additional \$494,000 for the Southeast Missouri Autism Center, and this year funding was maintained at \$494,000. In Southeast Missouri, we have seen a 107

percent increase in school-age autism diagnoses, and this center will be a great help to these families in our community.



We have created the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The commission was created to advise and make recommendations to the governor, General Assembly, and state agencies regarding matters

concerning all state levels of ASD services and to develop a comprehensive state plan that focuses on enhancing resources required to provide a full complement of ASD services necessary in the state. I have been pleased to sponsor two local members of our community who now serve on the commission. I am confident of the good work that will be accomplished by Dr. David Crowe, the founder of the Tailor Institute in Cape Girardeau, and Connie Herbert, the Director of the Southeast Missouri State University Autism Center for Diagnosis and Treatment.

Work continues this year to address the growing issue of autism. Senate Bill 167 is legislation that has been given initial approval in the Senate this year to help alleviate some of the challenges families and individuals living with autism deal with. 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 bill has my full support. I believe it will provide help for those who need access to autism care and services who otherwise would not be able to receive it.

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.

Much of the battle against autism is also being fought on a local level. These important groups in our community include:

Ethan and Friends for Autism, which was founded by Mike Sciortino of Cape Girardeau after his grandson, Ethan, was diagnosed with autism. Their mission is to increase autism awareness. As community advocates, the group conducts informational meetings and has fundraising events to raise autism awareness. Contact information: 232 Camellia Dr., Cape Girardeau, MO 63703, (573)225-1328, ethanandfriendsforautism.org

The Tailor Institute, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with high-functioning autism or Asperger's Syndrome (a condition sometimes referred to as the "highest functioning" form of autism) who exhibit areas of giftedness. The Tailor Institute helps these individuals to develop strategies for employment and independent living. Contact information: One University Plaza, 920 Broadway MS 0130, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701, (573)339-9552, www.tailorinstitute.org

The Judevine Center for Autism, which offers a full range of services and support to children and adults with autism and their families including: evaluations and assessments, parent training, workshops and seminars, transitional treatment, and residential services. Contact information: 107 S.

Broadview, Cape Girardeau, MO 63703, (573)339-9300, www.judevine.org

The Autism Center for Diagnosis and Treatment at Southeast Missouri State University, which is currently located in the SEMO Innovation Center. The new center will be an 11,582-square-foot facility next to the University at the old Washington School at the corner of Middle and Mill Streets in Cape Girardeau. The center will include special observation areas designed specifically for music therapy, occupational therapy, and life-skills training. The center will also be equipped with conference and training space for parent education and university instruction. Contact information: 920 Broadway, One University Plaza, MS0130, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701 (573)986-4985, semo.edu/autismcenter

Other helpful resources include:

The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, which provides vital clinical services, provides diagnostic, assessment and treatment services for children, youth and young adults, and offers a broad range of specialized medical, therapeutic, educational and behavioral interventions. They also specialize in autism research to identify new models of care. Contact information: University of Missouri, 300 Portland Street, Suite 110, Columbia, MO 65211, (573)882-6081, thompsoncenter.missouri.edu

MO-FEAT (Missouri-Families for Effective Autism Treatment), which provides monthly parent support and informational meetings on issues concerning home- and school-based intervention and identification of autism spectrum disorders. MO-FEAT offers quarterly community outings for family support and networking and publishes a statewide resource directory and literature on autism. Contact information: 2388 Schuetz Rd., Suite A-49, St. Louis, MO 63146, 1-877-275-8988, www.mofeat.org

Autism Speaks, which is the largest autism related non-profit healthcare agency in the U.S., raising over 69 million dollars to fund programs of research, awareness, advocacy and family service. Autism Speaks has also committed an unprecedented \$128 million in new research funding through 2014 to uncover the cause(s), prevention, treatments and cure for autism. Contact information: St. Louis Chapter (314)989-1003 or 1-866-500-6227, autismspeaks.org

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 or visit me on the web at <http://www.senate.mo.gov/crowell>.

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