

*Nothing is politically right  
that is morally wrong.*



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

MISSOURI SENATE  
JEFFERSON CITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2009

## **Senate Advances Insurance Coverage for Autism** ***Bill Secures Insurance for Autism-Related Services***

JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri families with children on the autism spectrum disorder are one step closer to be guaranteed that health carriers will provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders. The Missouri Senate approved the bill ??-?? Thursday?. The bill's sponsor, Sen. Scott T. Rupp, R-Wentzville, said children on the spectrum will be covered up to the age of 18.

"This is an absolute priority for families living with autism who need access to vital healthcare services for their children affected by this troubling disorder," Rupp said. "By passing this bill, we will be providing real help — and hope — to these families."

The measure, [Senate Bill 167](#), would build upon the state's commitment to support and empower families living with autism. The proposed legislation would require most health carriers that issue or renew health benefit plans to provide coverage for diagnosis and treatment of individuals up to age 18 and would restrict health carriers from refusing to issue or renew coverage based solely on the fact that an individual is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

The proposed insurance coverage would include a physician or psychiatrist's referral of ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapy — up to \$55,000 per year for individuals up to age 14.

Senate Leader Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, said early diagnosis and intervention is reported as the key to making sure children on the spectrum can have the best quality of life possible.

"We have worked to make prevention and early diagnosis and care a cornerstone of healthcare in Missouri. By passing this bill, we are making sure the same is true for these children and their families."

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

Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Glendale, spoke in support of the measure and shared his family's personal experiences with his 4 year-old son, Stephen, who falls on the spectrum and is non-verbal.

"By advancing this bill we are speaking loud and clear in this body that children with autism and their families are a priority," Schmitt said. "Through my personal experience I have spent long nights in hospital waiting rooms talking to other parents who face financial ruin just trying to afford the care their child desperately needs. For a small cost we are giving these children with autism real hope and opportunity to reach their full potential."

Last year, The Missouri Senate successfully advanced legislation to enhance autism healthcare services in Missouri, including the creation of a statewide commission to address the needs of individuals affected by autism spectrum disorders.

The bill now moves to the House for similar consideration. To track the bill, visit [www.senate.mo.gov](http://www.senate.mo.gov) - "key word" search for SB65.

###