



## ALASKA WOMEN'S LOBBY

*AWL Mission: To defend and advance the rights and needs of Women, Children and Families in Alaska*

P.O. Box 20891  
Juneau, Alaska 99802-0891  
[www.akwomenslobby.org](http://www.akwomenslobby.org)

### 2010 AWL Steering Committee Members

Caren Robinson  
Lobbyist

Geran Tarr,  
Jorden Nigro  
Co-Chairs

Jayne Andreen

Elizabeth Belknap

Nancy Courtney

Torie Foote

LaRae Jones

Rebecca Madison

Taber Rehbaum

Kari Robinson

Nancy Scheetz-  
Freymler

Libby Silberling

### Letter of Support - SB74

#### Insurance Coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Alaska Women's Lobby, a statewide group with steering committees in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau organized to protect and advance the rights of women, children and families supports SB74. [A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) study in 2006 estimates an average of one in 110 children have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Alaska should join the 35 states and the District of Columbia that have laws related to autism and insurance coverage. A November 2010 Insurance Coverage for Autism paper by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) documents at least 23 of those states—Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont and Wisconsin—specifically require insurers to provide coverage for the treatment of autism. The increasing number of states adopting comprehensive autism mandates, Medicaid coverage of ASD-related services, and coverage of these services by the U.S. military health plan provide further evidence that health insurance coverage of ASD-related services is appropriate.

While some ASD-related services are provided in the public schools, medical experts, advocacy groups, and parents indicate that there is a need for additional services outside of the school setting. Although the insurance industry often claims that treatment for ASDs, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)-based therapy are educational and their coverage not appropriate for health insurance, if the premise that the role of health insurance is to promote public health, encourage the use of preventative care, and provide financial protection for excessive financial expenses for unexpected illnesses, the proposed mandate appears consistent with the role of health insurance.

Children with autism have substantial medical needs and have a difficult time accessing necessary treatments through Medicaid and private health insurance. Most insurance policies contain specific exclusions for autism. This is a hardship for many families, who are often forced to cope with delayed, inadequate, and fragmented care through the Medicaid system. Often, families must pay for treatments out-of-pocket or forego them. These treatments may be costly. Some families may spend more than \$50,000 per year on autism-related therapies, such as ABA (NCSL 2010 report). A study in 2006 by the [Harvard School of Public Health](#) estimated that it costs \$3.2 million to take care of an individual with autism over his or her lifetime.

Please help Alaskan families struggling with providing the best care possible for their children with ASD and pass SB74