



Sean Parnell, Governor  
State of Alaska

**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**

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March 24, 2011

Senator Johnny Ellis  
State of Alaska  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 119  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: SB 74 Insurance Coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders

Dear Senator Ellis:

Thank you for sponsoring SB 74, which provides private insurance coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education strongly supports SB 74, which will provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, including but not limited to applied behavioral analysis, the leading evidence-based intervention for autism.

As you know, many families struggle when their child is diagnosed as being on the spectrum, because many insurance policies specifically exclude treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorders (even if those treatments are routinely covered otherwise). This bill would put services for people with autism on the same footing as other health issues when it comes to insurance coverage of treatment and prevention services. Otherwise, families often go into debt in order to secure needed services, or go without them.

In addition, 40 years of research clearly shows that 50 percent of children with severe autism who receive early intervention and treatment do not require lifelong services and supports. According to a study conducted by Michael Ganz, a Harvard University Economist, with treatment, the state will see savings of \$208,500 per person in avoided or reduced special education costs and lifetime savings of \$1.8 million. Without treatment it is estimated lifetime costs to the State of Alaska will exceed \$3.2 million per person.

Thank you again for your support on this important issue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donna Swihart".

Donna Swihart, Chair