

The TRUST

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

February 7, 2011

Senator Johnny Ellis
Room #119
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: SB 74 – Private Autism Insurance Coverage

Dear Senator Ellis,

I am writing in support of **SB 74 – Private Autism Insurance Coverage**

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (The Trust) appreciates your efforts to ensure that children in Alaska who experience autism receive the supports they need to be active members of our Alaskan communities. The Trust supports SB 74, which mandates that private insurance companies include coverage for treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

The Trust advocates for a robust continuum of healthcare opportunities for its beneficiaries, those experiencing developmental disabilities, mental illness, Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias and chronic alcoholics with psychosis. In Alaska today 1,512 children and young people have autism, approximately 454 of whom need significant clinical treatment. In response to these numbers, The Trust has partnered with the *Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education* to identify and develop treatment options for persons diagnosed with a disorder on the autism spectrum.

Thirty years of research demonstrates that with intensive early intervention, children on the autism spectrum could gain a significant number of IQ points, and half of them could achieve normal functioning within 2-3 years of treatment. With early intervention and treatment, Alaska will see a savings of \$208,500 per capita in avoided special education costs and a lifetime savings of \$1.08 million per capita. According to economists, without treatment it is estimated it will cost the state \$3.2 million per capita. Requiring that private insurance policies include coverage for treating autism, we can help many children access the services they need, and live more productive lives.

We appreciate your advocacy on behalf of Trust beneficiaries; specifically, beneficiaries diagnosed with autism and their families, and look forward to continuing to work with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Jeff Jessee, CEO

