

STATE OF KANSAS



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HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER

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House Bill 2764
House Insurance Committee

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today in order to testify in support of House Bill 2764, which would continue coverage for state employees provided under Kansas' 2010 autism insurance reform law and extend the same coverage to all state-regulated group plans for individuals with autism through age 18.

My testimony today and my involvement with this issue represents a personal transformation for me both as a conservative legislator, and a compassionate citizen. I am not an expert on autism, nor do I claim to fully understand the treatment or nuance involved in rescuing these children. But as a fellow legislator, I hope my testimony will help you understand why this issue has grown to become one of my greatest passions, and explain why I've chosen to introduce this legislation. It's been truly enlightening to see the number of families that are impacted by autism. The list of both friends and legislators that have come to me and shared their stories has made a profound impact on my perceptions.

Perhaps like many of you, the first time I was approached on this topic I knew very little about it. I assumed it was untreatable, was told it was an educational disorder, and quickly determined there was little to be done aside from dedicating dwindling state resources.

However, as states continued to pass us by and the evidence mounted, it became increasingly difficult to ignore the reality of the issue. Autism is not untreatable. It is not an educational disorder—in fact, when treated early, it is frequently a very manageable diagnosis. The hurdles we face are not medical or biological, they are systemic. Our healthcare system in Kansas is failing to recognize what other states appear to be grasping year after year.

Nationally, 29 states representing **70 percent** of the United States population have enacted autism insurance reform legislation. A number of states are considering bills to strengthen their existing laws, including Missouri. In a recently published report, the Missouri Department of Insurance found its autism insurance reform initiative had made coverage available to 1.3 million state residents while impacting premiums by 0.1 percent, a fraction of the impact that insurance

industry lobbyists had claimed. While their model includes an even greater level of care than our state employee plan, the data it's provided us proves to me that reliable coverage is entirely feasible in Kansas.

It's unfortunate to see other states pass us by in terms of coverage; however the data based on their experiences is valuable to the rest of the nation. Without it, legislators, insurance companies, and their customers would justifiably fear skyrocketing costs as families desperately flocked to Kansas to obtain care. This is no longer the case. Reliable data proves what advocates have always assured us—autism can be treated cost effectively. The data is consistent and conclusive.

The other critical factor for you to understand is the simple fact that in the majority of cases, if we reach children early enough, there's a very good chance they will be able to begin their education as a "mainstream" student, or succeed with individual education plans. This has a dramatic impact on our educational system. However, in order to accomplish this, we must reach children *before* they reach normal school age. Once again, autism is not an educational issue. It's a medical issue. This legislation would recognize the distinction, deliver the care they desperately need, and save the state millions of dollars in educational costs.

The experts you hear from today will provide you with facts and information to make the case clear. I will simply leave you with my advice as a fellow legislator. Take this opportunity to make a decision that makes sense both fiscally, and morally. This legislation presents you with the opportunity to save thousands of children from lives of dependency as wards of the State, while saving the State of Kansas literally billions of dollars of institutional and Special Education costs in the lifetime of some of us in this room. You may never have another chance to make such an impact for one specific group and save the taxpayers of Kansas multiple millions of dollars as you will by supporting these children and their families. Please carefully consider the information you're provided with this afternoon, and join me in supporting House Bill 2764.