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Steinberg Announces Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related Disorders, Highlights Senate Bill Package

(SACRAMENTO) – Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) today announced the establishment of the Senate Select Committee on Autism (ASD) & Related Disorders which will build on the trailblazing work and important contributions of the three-year [California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism](#), which was Chaired by Steinberg and ended in November 2008.

“This Select Committee signals California’s ongoing bipartisan commitment to individuals with autism and their families,” Steinberg said. “It will provide a legislative forum for research, analysis, deliberations, and outreach on the most pressing issues and concerns facing families who are dealing with ASD.”

At a press conference today Steinberg introduced the members of the Select Committee which he will Chair. He also discussed the committee’s upcoming activities that will focus on issues related to establishing appropriate health insurance coverage; early identification and treatment; and promoting appropriate employment and housing for individuals with ASD.

The Select Committee will soon establish a series of Task Forces and Working Groups that will work with consumers, advocates and leaders throughout the state to deal with the autism epidemic. The Committee will be working with some of the state’s most distinguished leaders who are committed to advancing strong and effective autism public policy.

Feda Almaliti, the mother of a 4 ½ year old autistic son, spoke at the press conference about her long and tedious but successful fight to receive health insurance coverage for her son’s treatments. “The vast majority of families today receive absolutely no treatment for their children’s autism from their health plans. I think one very important role of this Senate Select committee will be to hold hearings and conduct research to try to uncover why these families aren’t getting the health care they pay for and to ensure solutions are found,” Almaliti said.

Additionally, Senate members highlighted a package of autism related bills that have been introduced this legislative session.

As part of the proceedings and in recognition of National Autism Awareness Month, Steinberg presented a Legislative Resolution to Dr. Barbara Firestone, President and CEO of The Help Group, declaring April 28th, 2009 *The Help Group Autism Awareness Day in California* in recognition of The Help Group's autism efforts. Dr. Firestone served as the Vice-Chair of the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism.

“Under the visionary leadership of Senator Darrell Steinberg, the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism that I had the privilege to Vice Chair, and now the establishment of the Senate Select Committee on Autism & Related Disorders, signal California's ongoing commitment to bringing help and hope to individuals with autism and their families,” said Dr. Firestone.

Today, 1 in 150 children are affected by ASD and the CDC considers autism a national public health crisis. Once considered rare, autism is the fastest growing serious developmental disability and is more prevalent than juvenile diabetes, childhood cancer and pediatric AIDS combined. Nationally, the diagnosis of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade.

Members of the Senate Select Committee on Autism and Related Disorders:

Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento), Chair

Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez (D-Shafter)

Senate Minority Leader Dennis Hollingsworth (R-Murrieta)

Senator Elaine Alquist (D-San Jose)

Senator Roy Ashburn (R-Bakersfield)

Senator Lou Correa (D-Santa Ana)

Senator Carol Liu (D-Pasadena)

Senator Alex Padilla (D- Pacoima)

Senator Fran Pavley (D- Agoura Hills)

Senator Lois Wolk (D-Davis)

Senate Bill Package:

SB 383 (Liu) – requires the Department of Developmental Services to partner with one or more regional centers to implement a two-year pilot program to screen toddlers for autism spectrum disorder in at least 3 key geographic areas around the state.

“If we can identify child with autism at an early age and intervene in the right ways, we can achieve better lifetime results and outcomes for California's children,” Liu said.

SB 682 (Padilla) – Authorizes county offices of education to create pilot programs that offer Career Technical Education options to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other disabilities or special needs. This comes after the 2007 report release by the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism found gaps in programs and services related to the education and treatment.

“In the next few years, a significant number of young people with autism will enter adulthood and transition into the community. The state urgently needs to expand Career Technical Education opportunities for Californians with autism. SB 682 will help individuals with autism and other special needs become self-sufficient members of society,” said Senator Padilla.

SB 812 (Ashburn) – This bill would require the state and local housing plans to identify and analyze the specific housing needs of adults with autism spectrum disorders in cooperation with stakeholders. In addition this bill will commission a study on the housing needs of people with ASD who receive services from the State Department of Developmental Disabilities or regional centers.

“Within the next decade, California will face a wave of youths with ASD who are transitioning into adulthood, and who will have specific housing needs,” Ashburn said. “SB 812 will help ensure that we accurately evaluate and meet the housing needs of this influx of young adults within our communities, enabling them to live healthy and productive lives.”

SB 621 (Florez) – will ensure that Career Technical Education curriculum in California includes materials for special education students-including those with autism.

“Career Technical Education is an important program that provides students with skills to enter and succeed in the job market,” Florez said. “SB 621 ensures we do not close the door of opportunity on autistic students by ensuring they are included in our school’s Career Technical Education programs.”