

**For Immediate Release
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AUTISM LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING HOSTED BY THE HELP GROUP

Senator Tom Torlakson and Dr. Barbara Firestone to address early identification and intervention initiatives in California

SHERMAN OAKS, CA – State Senator Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, is the keynote speaker at **The Help Group’s Autism Legislative Briefing on Wednesday, July 23, 2008**. **Dr. Barbara Firestone, President & CEO, The Help Group and Vice Chair, California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism** will present an overview of the Commission’s recommendations and the autism legislative package.

Sen. Torlakson, Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, authored **SB 1475**, one of the nine bills that comprise the California Blue Ribbon Commission’s autism legislative package to improve the lives of individuals with autism spectrum disorders in California. SB 1475 also known as a “**Pilot on Transitional services for Early ASD Treatment**,” is currently pending in the Legislature. If passed, SB 1475 would identify and implement existing models of excellence and best practices to establish seamless, coordinated and integrated programs between Regional Centers and local school districts for the identification, assessment and treatment of children with ASD and other developmental delays from birth to five years of age.

“I am pleased to have authored SB 1475 on behalf of the children and families of our State,” said Torlakson. “Research indicates that early intervention creates lifelong benefits for young people with autism spectrum disorders. SB 1475 is an important step to ensure the continuity of early identification services.”

The California Autism Legislative Package embodies many of the significant findings and policy recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism. This landmark legislation offers hope and real change that will positively impact many California families,” said Dr. Firestone, who also served as the Chair of the Blue Ribbon Commission’s Early Identification and Intervention Task Force and authored the award winning book, *Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge*. “We salute Senator Torlakson on his important efforts to address the critical need for improved transition services for children with ASD.”

The program will also feature **Dr. Elizabeth Laugeson, Director, The Help Group – UCLA Autism Research Alliance** and Clinical Instructor in the Department of Psychiatry and Bio-Behavioral Sciences at the UCLA Semel Institute, and **Kristina Kell, parent of Norton, a child with an autism spectrum disorder who graduated from**

The Help Group's Young Learners Preschool for Autism and now attends its Village Glen Kindergarten.

- **WHAT:** Autism Legislative Briefing: The Early Identification and Intervention Agenda
- **WHEN:** 10 a.m. – 12 noon, July 23, 2008
- **WHERE:** The Help Group – Sherman Oaks Campus, 13130 Burbank Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, CA 91401.

For additional information, please visit: www.thehelpgroup.org or <http://senweb03.senate.ca.gov/autism/index.html>

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ABOUT THE HELP GROUP

Founded in 1975, The Help Group serves children with a wide range of special needs and is the largest and most comprehensive nonprofit of its kind in the United States. Recognized as a leader in the field of autism, it offers extensive special education, therapy and assessment services. The Help Group educates over 750 students on a daily basis in its four innovative autism day schools.

Through its public awareness and outreach programs, graduate and postgraduate professional training, parent education programs and efforts at the state and national levels, The Help Group touches the lives of children with special needs across the United States and in other parts of the world.