

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON AUTISM CONVENES ITS SECOND PUBLIC HEARING IN SACRAMENTO

The California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism held its second public hearing at the State Capitol on March 1, 2007. At this important meeting the Commission heard insightful reports from its three Task Forces: Early Identification and Intervention (children 0-5); Education and Professional Development (school age children); and Transitional Services and Supports (individuals 22 years of age and older). These task forces were formed to advise the Commission about gaps in programs, services and funding in their respective areas and to make recommendations to close these gaps.

State Senator, Darrell Steinberg serves as Chair of this 16-member Commission and Dr. Barbara Firestone, serves as Vice Chair. The groundbreaking legislation that authorized the creation of this Commission was authored by Senate President pro Tem Don Perata with the support of Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez and was sponsored by The Help Group.

The hearing was called to order by Senator Steinberg, who thanked each task force for helping "California to develop an autism agenda and make it a top tier priority." He addressed the recent increase of news coverage on autism and its impact on California, stating, "Since our last meeting the CDC issued a report that the incidence of autism in the United States is now affecting one in every 150 children. The study also estimated that 560,000 children under the age of 21 are impacted by autism spectrum disorders. Autism is now, and has been an urgent pub-

lic health issue, and the work of our Commission is intended to guide California, the legislature and the governor to develop aggressive, well thought out proposals to address this."

In her opening remarks Dr. Firestone said, "We are at the advent of a new era and this Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission in California is one of the symbols of this new era that we are beginning in the area of autism spectrum disorders. The increasing number of children has given us a mandate. The demand for services has never been greater. It is our responsibility to help ensure that all of the emerging advances and all of the new knowledge that we're beginning to acquire gets translated into the systems of care that we have in the State of California so that we can optimize services for individuals living with autism and their families."



Dr. Barbara Firestone, Darrell Steinberg



In addition to her Vice Chair role, Dr. Firestone is the Blue Ribbon Task Force Chair on Early Identification and Intervention. Dr. Laurie Stephens, Director of Autism Spectrum Disorders Programs at The Help Group, is serving on the Education and Professional Development Task Force. Principal of The Help Group's Bridgeport School, Anita Allardice is serving on the Transitional Services and Supports Task Force.

Over the next few months, the Commission will be holding town-hall style meetings throughout the State to gather further input on these preliminary recommendations. The Commissions findings will be presented to the governor and legislature in the fall of 2007.

"At the March public hearing, the Commissioners were clearly impressed and engaged by the excellent recommendations that were presented by the three task force groups. I am certain the important work of the Commission will result in meaningful changes to improve the lives of individuals with autism and their families." Dr. Louis Vismara, Policy Consultant to the Senate President pro Tem, Don Perata



Dr. Louis Vismara

For more information about the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism, please visit: <http://senweb03.senate.ca.gov/autism>