

DR. BARBARA FIRESTONE APPOINTED VICE-CHAIR OF CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON AUTISM

The 16-member Commission is charged with identifying gaps in programs, services and funding related to the early identification, education and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders. It will submit its findings and recommendations to the governor and Legislature by September 30, 2007. The Blue Ribbon Commission was adopted by the Senate Rules Committee in June 2005 and the Assembly in September 2005.

“The call to action has never been greater and The Help Group looks forward to working with Senator Perata, Speaker Núñez and the Commission on this important mission,” said Dr. Firestone. The call to form the Commission began in April, 2005 at a press conference at the State Capitol that was jointly held by Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata and Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez and The Help Group. “You look at autism and one statistic is scarier than the next,” Perata said at the 2005 press conference. “A new case every 20 minutes... 20,000 more students with autism in California schools in just 12 years...a nationwide economic impact of \$90 billion, which is expected to double in the next decade. We want to bring together some of the best and most effective minds in California to help us confront this epidemic with short- and long-term actions the legislature and governor can take.”



Cindy Asner, Dr. Lou Vismara, Matina Kolokotronis, Dr. Barbara Firestone, Ken Simril, Dr. David Feinberg, Magdalena Beltran-del Olmo, Nancy Miller, Donna Ross Jones, Areva Martin

During the press conference, Dr. Firestone announced the creation of The Help Group National Autism Foundation to promote greater awareness, early identification, early intervention, and education and treatment opportunities for children, adolescents and young adults with autism.

“Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the U.S.,” Speaker Núñez said in a news release announcing the Commission appointments. “We need to understand the policy implications of this growth and how the state should best prepare. The members of this Commission are all leaders in the area of autism and will assist us in focusing on practical policy solutions and creating the service infrastructure to meet the needs of people with autism and their families. This will be a real-time effort with real results,” Núñez added. “In addition to the human costs for individuals and their families, autism has a tremendous cost for our economy and our schools. We can make California the leadership state, not just in autism cases, but in autism solutions.”

Attorney and former Assemblymember Darrell Steinberg, Commission Chair, and Dr. Firestone are joined on the Blue Ribbon Commission by other appointees, including: Cindy Asner, Magdalena Beltran-del Olmo, Stephen Beneto, Maureen Burness, Rudy Castruita, Ed.D, Dr. David Feinberg, Dr. Ronald Huff, David Kears, Dr. Lynn Koegel, Areva Martin, Rick Rollens, Kenneth Simril, Eleni Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis and Dr. Albert Wang.