

# A Bridge to the Future for Children with Autism

## Senate Bill 1789 / House Bill 2105

By Senator Herron and Representative Shepard

### History

In 2006 the Tennessee General Assembly took unanimous, bipartisan, and proactive stand to address the needs of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by passing the Autism Equity Act (AEA). The legislation was a first step to tearing down barriers that prevent children with an ASD from receiving needed therapies.



### Looking to the Future

Now that parents, providers, and health insurers in Tennessee have had a couple of years to begin breaking down the barriers to coverage, it is time to take the next step. New legislation has been introduced that will build on the AEA by ensuring that children **and** adolescents receive therapeutic levels of care.

#### **The New Legislation** – What does it do?

- ❖ **Age for Coverage** – Previously coverage was limited to age 11, but it will rise to age 17 to ensure all children and adolescents have access to therapies.
- ❖ **Clarifies the Types of Therapies** – Makes explicit the variety of therapies that a child with an ASD may need such as speech/language, occupational, and behavioral therapies, including Applied Behavioral Analysis and others.
- ❖ **Therapeutic Levels of Coverage** – Ensures that health care plans provide not only access to therapies, but also to therapeutic levels of proven, evidence-based care necessary to make meaningful improvements in long-term functioning.

#### **Benefits of Coverage**

**Preserving the Family** – Raising a child with an ASD can be emotionally, financially, and socially challenging for families. Many families go deeply in debt to pay for necessary health care therapies while many more children simply go without the benefit of proven, research-based therapies that can be life changing.

**Treatment Today or Dependency Tomorrow** – The key to minimizing the long-term impact of an ASD is early treatment through a variety of therapies tailored to the needs of the individual child. Providing therapeutic levels of coverage early in life is the key to improving a child's ability to participate in the world around them while becoming independent and self-sufficient.