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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lt. Governor Kinder Signs Legislation to Create the Missouri Commission on Autism

JEFFERSON CITY – Lt. Governor Peter Kinder today, serving as acting governor, signed legislation creating the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders to advise the Governor and legislators on matters relating to Autism. The bill also creates the Office of Autism Services in the Department of Mental Health.

"Parents of children with autism are in difficult circumstances," Lt. Governor Kinder said. "It is vitally important that the state do everything it can to help children and families cope with Autism Spectrum Disorders and I believe this legislation will do just that."

Senate Bill 768, sponsored by Senator Scott Rupp, strengthens the state's commitment to helping families and children cope with autism. The new legislation creates the Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders and the Office of Autism to ensure that Missouri's Governor and General Assembly is provided with up-to-date information about the continuing need for autism services in the state.

"With these groundbreaking measures, we will ensure that Missouri has the best resources available in diagnosis and care services for individuals and families living with autism," Sen. Rupp said. "Autism affects one in every 150 children, and Missouri intends to become a leader in addressing this national health issue."

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The Commission must develop a comprehensive statewide plan for an integrated system of training, treatment, and services for individuals of all ages with autism spectrum disorder.

The Commission's membership will include representatives from the General Assembly, various state agencies, other organizations involved with autism, as well as parents and individuals with ASD.

The Office of Autism Services will provide leadership in program development for children and adults with Autism spectrum disorders. Such leadership will include establishment of program standards and coordination of program capacity.

The bill was a result of recommendations made by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism formed last year by Senate Leader Mike Gibbons and chaired by Sen. Scott Rupp. The 16-person panel consisted of lawmakers, parents, doctors, health officials and educators and was charged with creating a roadmap for improving state services for families living with autism. Their report was presented in December and can be viewed online at www.senate.mo.gov/autism.

"We promised to turn the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations into reality and we have," Sen. Gibbons said. "We want to empower families living with autism and this commission will advise government on how to implement the best practice models of the ideas presented by the panel."

Last year, \$3.9 million in new funding was allotted to shorten the waiting lists for families seeking services for early intervention and diagnoses of autism. That funding alone more than doubled previous dollars granted for autism diagnoses, treatment, and research.

This year, under Governor Matt Blunt's leadership, \$12.4 million in new funding has been secured for services relating to autism – including funding to help build a world-class treatment facility at the Thompson Center in Columbia.

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