



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Governor Martin O'Malley Proclaims April as Autism Awareness Month Commission to Study Autism Spectrum Disorders, produce statewide plan

BALTIMORE, MD (March 31, 2010) - In response to an alarming increase in the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Governor Martin O'Malley has proclaimed April as Autism Awareness Month, according to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Maryland has seen a 57 percent increase in the number of autism-related diagnoses from 2002 to 2006.

"A growing number of Maryland families need the research, intervention and continuous care to properly deal with an autism-related diagnosis," said Governor O'Malley. "We want to understand the state-of-the-art in autism programs so we can provide the highest level of assistance possible to every Maryland child and adult with this unique need."

"There is no silver bullet we can provide a child to make autism disappear," said John M. Colmers, DHMH Secretary. "With proper diagnosis and a continuum of care, Maryland can and will help families affected by an autism-related diagnosis to better meet the challenges they face."

"Early intervention and educational services are key to helping children with autism," said State Superintendent of Schools Nancy S. Grasmick. "By putting a spotlight on the disorder, we believe that more parents and families will find the resources they need."

Citing a growing concern among public health officials, educators and families over the steady increase of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the newly-formed Maryland Commission on Autism meets in late April in its ongoing quest to develop a comprehensive statewide autism plan. The 26-member Commission was formed in 2009 by the Maryland General Assembly (SB 963) and is chaired by Renata J. Henry, DHMH Deputy Secretary of Behavioral Health and Disabilities and Carol Ann Heath, MSDE Assistant State Superintendent who serves as vice chair.

"Among the many areas we're evaluating is how to best facilitate and coordinate research opportunities amongst Maryland's vast institutional, educational and public health resources," said Deputy Secretary Henry. "We believe that if we can help advance serious research in all areas of autism, we will help every family dealing with autism."

In addition, the Commission will study ways to address the needs of children who are about to transition from the Autism Medicaid waiver to adult services; assess the need for coordinated,

enhanced and targeted special education for each Maryland region; and engage appropriate colleges and universities to ensure support in the development of certification or degree programs for students specializing in Autism Spectrum Disorder intervention. The group will also examine barriers that prevent accurate prevalence information and recommend ways to ensure accurate reporting of data.

The Commission will hold its regularly scheduled open meeting on April 20 in Easton beginning at 9:30 a.m. This is the first in a series of fact-finding sessions to be held in different regions of the state to gain public input on the status of existing education and service systems; needs that are not adequately being addressed and steps the public feels can best help the state move forward. Information about meetings and the Commission can be found on the Autism Commission Web site at <http://dhmh.maryland.gov/autism/> .

The Commission is scheduled to submit preliminary findings and recommendations for a state plan to the General Assembly by June 1, 2011, with a final report due on June 1, 2012.

Commission members include:

- Dorinda Adams, Department of Human Resources, Office of Adult Services
- Carol Samuels Botts, M.D., Kaiser Permanente
- Denise Cedrone, school psychologist, Frederick County Public Schools
- Cristine Ceely, physical therapist, Montgomery County Public Schools
- Dr. Lisa Crabtree, occupational therapist, assistant professor, Towson University
- Kelli Cummings, Department of Disabilities director of Community Living Policy
- Ed Feinberg, Anne Arundel County Public Schools
- David Geier, medical researcher
- Scott Hagaman, M.D., medical director for the Linwood Center
- Carol Ann Heath, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) assistant state superintendent
- Renata Henry, DHMH deputy secretary for Behavioral Health and Disabilities;
- State Senator Katherine Klausmeier
- Ellen Kuhn, Office of the Attorney General, assistant attorney general, Consumer Protection Division
- Rebecca Landa, P.H.D, associate professor of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins University
- Rachel London, director of Children and Family Policy, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
- Wendell McKay, MD, pediatrician
- H. Angela Mezzomo, Maryland Speech Language Hearing Association
- Hon. Karen Montgomery, Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children
- Debra Perry, president, AFT Healthcare Maryland
- State Delegate Kirill Reznik
- Marjorie Shulbank, MSDE section chief, Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program, Preschool Services Branch
- Thelma Thompson, president, University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- Careen Wallace, parent of an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Fred Whiton, Jr., parent of an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Zosia Zaks, individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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PROCLAMATION COPY FOLLOWS:

*Autism Awareness Month
April 2010*

WHEREAS, Autism Spectrum Disorders typically begin in early childhood and affect people throughout their lifetime, especially in the areas of social interaction and communication; and

WHEREAS, the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders has increased by approximately 57% in Maryland between 2002 and 2006, creating a growing concern among public health and education officials; and

WHEREAS, Marylanders identified with Autism Spectrum Disorders benefit from early diagnosis, intervention and ongoing supports and services designed to meet their individual needs; and

WHEREAS, the State of Maryland has established the Maryland Commission on Autism which is charged with advising and making recommendations to the Governor, General Assembly and relevant state agencies regarding matters concerning services for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders including health care, education and other adolescent and adult services across the lifespan.

Now, Therefore, I . . .

do hereby proclaim April as Autism Awareness Month in Maryland . . .

Governor Martin O'Malley

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