FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VIRGINIA MANDATED BENEFITS COMMISSION VOTES TO RECOMMEND AUTISM INSURANCE REFORM BILL HB 1588

Commission Votes 6-4 to Advance Bill on to Commerce and Labor Committee in the House of Delegates.

RICHMOND, VA (November 19, 2008) -- Parents of children with autism and other advocates were in attendance today to witness the Mandated Health Insurance Benefits Special Advisory Commission vote on House Bill 1588, the autism insurance reform bill. The commission voted 6-4 to recommend the bill after Delegate Bob Marshall of Loudon pledged he would do whatever it took to advance the legislation. “Lives and futures of families were saved here today. I hope that the members of the Labor and Commerce Committee follow through with an action that will undoubtedly save lives and families.”

After hearing more debate and comments on the legislation, Chairman Tim Hugo of Fairfax made his plea to the Commission to act now. "This is a big day for families with autistic children. I couldn't vote to condemn any more children to darkness."

The legislation now must follow the normal legislative process and will first be heard by the Commerce and Labor committee in the House of Delegates. A companion bill is expected to be filed in the Senate. “This is one step in the process and I encourage all Virginians to stay vigilant and help move this bill through the legislative process in January,” said Senator McEachin of Richmond.

Sponsored by Delegates Bob Marshall and David Poisson, both of Loudon, HB 1588 would require private health insurance companies to provide coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorder for individuals under the age of 21. Coverage would be subject to an inflation adjusted maximum benefit of $36,000 annually. The bill includes diagnosis and coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy.

"This is an important step toward insurance reform in the state of Virginia," said Elizabeth Emken, Autism Speaks Vice President of Government Relations. "Our hope is that, by the end of this session, Virginia will join the growing ranks of states that have acted to address insurers' discrimination against children with autism."

Families affected by autism are often forced to pay out-of-pocket for medically necessary autism therapies, which can easily cost over $50,000 per year. Many families in Virginia and across the country are literally going broke. To address this issue,
insurance reform legislation has already been passed in seven states, while some 20 states are expected to propose legislation in the upcoming legislative session.

About Autism
Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The prevalence of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

About Autism Speaks
Autism Speaks is dedicated to increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders, to funding research into the causes, prevention and treatments for autism, and to advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. It was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Bob Wright is Senior Advisor at Lee Equity Partners and served as vice chairman, General Electric, and chief executive officer of NBC and NBC Universal for more than twenty years. Autism Speaks merged with both the National Alliance for Autism Research (NAAR) and Cure Autism Now (CAN), bringing together the nation’s three leading autism advocacy organizations. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit www.autismspeaks.org

###

www.autismspeaks.org