

Illinois Legislative Update April 2006

After 8 Legislative Hearings and March Autism Rally this session:

1. Funding for families

Top priority for 2006 was to set up a Medicaid waiver program to provide direct supports to individuals with autism so they can remain in their homes and in our communities. We are pleased to report that the Governor has agreed to write a Children's Medicaid Waiver for Children with Developmental Disabilities, including autism, by the end of this year. However, the budget at this time contains no new funding for this purpose, so no new families will be served by the waiver, at least not for several years.

We hope to expand DHS' 72D in-home supports program by \$5 million.

2. Health insurance

House Bill 4125 passed

We have also had success expanding health insurance, through House Bill 4125, which adds 20 hours of speech therapy to large group and HMO insurance policies for children with autism. This should result in additional services of up to \$2500 per year for families on these types of policies. Note that not every insurance policy qualifies for this mandate. This bill was signed by the governor this spring.

3. Schools

House Bill 4987 passed

The General Assembly has also passed House Bill 4987, which allows public schools to hire Board Certified Behavior Analysts, who often oversee programs for students with autism. This will not require schools to do this, but for many it will allow vastly improved expertise in autism and improved programs. Schools will get personnel reimbursement from ISBE for hiring BCBA's (\$8000) as they do with other certified special education staff. This bill was signed by the Governor this spring.

State Board of Education funds IATTAP

Finally, we were successful in obtaining additional funding to the State Board of Education's only autism teacher training program, the Illinois Autism Training and Technical Assistance Project. This program currently receives no state funding whatsoever and has been relying entirely on a federal discretionary grant. Through hearings and advocacy with the Board, ISBE finally provided \$100,000 in the Education Budget for the IATTAP program, a small step, but a line item that can be expanded in future years.

2007 Proposed Special Education Rules change

Adding "autism" shall include but not be limited to, any Autism Spectrum Disorder that affects a child's educational performance