

Senate Bill 161

By: Senators Grant of the 25th, Williams of the 19th, Johnson of the 1st, Thomas of the 54th,  
Cowsert of the 46th and others

**AS PASSED SENATE**

**A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT**

1 To amend Chapter 1 of Title 37 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
2 governing and regulation of mental health, so as to provide for legislative intent; to provide  
3 for the establishment of a state-wide task force to develop a plan for education and services  
4 regarding autism; to provide for the membership and appointment of members of such task  
5 force; to provide for duties and responsibilities; to provide for reports and recommendations  
6 from such task force; to provide for related matters; to provide for automatic repeal; to  
7 provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:**

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 The General Assembly declares its intent to develop a State-wide Autism Task Force due to  
11 the increased numbers of children diagnosed with autism, a complex brain disorder with a  
12 range of symptoms and syndromes that has no cure. This task force will serve as a "brain  
13 trust" for Georgia so that it may establish policy by gathering scientific minds, researchers,  
14 physicians, and parents of children affected by this disease to create better screening,  
15 education, treatment, and services for those children and to recommend a unified and  
16 coordinated agenda for addressing autism in the State of Georgia. Early therapeutic  
17 treatment for these children has been shown to reduce costs to families and to the State of  
18 Georgia. The goal of this task force will be to review prevalence data for autism spectrum  
19 disorders, review current programs and funding, determine gaps in services and access  
20 issues, review best practices in the field, and provide for a comprehensive plan with  
21 recommendations and identifiable needs.

22 **SECTION 2.**

23 Chapter 1 of Title 37 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to governing and  
24 regulation of mental health, is amended by adding a new article to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 6

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37-1-120.

(a) There is established within the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities a statewide Autism Task Force. The task force shall be composed of members appointed as provided in this Code section who shall serve without compensation except for actual expenses incurred for travel on the official business of the task force. Vacancies in the task force shall be filled by appointment in the manner of the original appointment.

(b) The task force shall be composed of 21 members as follows:

(1) The commissioner of behavioral health and developmental disabilities, or his or her designee, who shall act as the chairperson of the task force;

(2) The commissioner of the department of community health, or his or her designee;

(3) The State School Superintendent, or his or her designee;

(4) The commissioner of the department of human services; or his or her designee;

(5) The Commissioner of Insurance, or his or her designee;

(6) One member shall be a practicing Georgia pediatrician and shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives;

(7) One member shall be a representative of the Georgia Hospital Association and shall be appointed by the President of the Senate;

(8) The Governor shall appoint an additional 14 members of the task force as follows:

(A) A representative from the Georgia Chapter of the Autism Society of America;

(B) A parent of a Georgia child diagnosed with autism or a member of Parent to Parent of Georgia;

(C) A representative from the Georgia Association of Health Plans;

(D) A representative from the Marcus Center in Atlanta;

(E) A representative from the Matthew Reardon Center in Savannah;

(F) A physician professor representative from one of the medical schools in Georgia specializing in neurology;

(G) A registered nurse who serves children in schools;

(H) A licensed speech-language pathologist;

(I) A licensed psychologist;

(J) A licensed psychiatrist;

(K) An executive director of one of Easter Seals' locations in Georgia;

(L) A representative from the Georgia Chapter of Autism Speaks;

(M) A representative from the Georgia Chamber of Commerce; and

(N) A representative of the Georgia National Federation of Independent Business.

(c) The chairperson shall convene the first meeting of the task force before July 31, 2010.

(d) The task force shall have the following duties and responsibilities:

- 62 (1) To develop a plan to educate the public and health care professionals about the  
 63 advantages and methods of early screening, diagnosis, and treatment of autism and its  
 64 complications;
- 65 (2) To develop a comprehensive plan to:
- 66 (i) Educate health care professionals about early intervention for children with autism  
 67 including therapy options for patients;
- 68 (ii) Educate health care professionals and parents regarding available diagnostics;
- 69 (iii) Educate parents on available services and funding sources for serving their  
 70 children's needs; and
- 71 (iv) Craft public policy on autism.
- 72 (3) To make recommendations on the implementation of a cost-effective plan for early  
 73 screening, diagnosis, and treatment of autism and its related syndromes and its  
 74 complications for Georgia's population;
- 75 (4) To make recommendations on the implementation of a disease management program;
- 76 (5) To provide for an interim report of its findings and recommendations to the  
 77 chairpersons of the Senate and House of Representatives Health and Human Services  
 78 Committees no later than January 15, 2011.
- 79 (6) To provide a report of its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly,  
 80 the Governor, and the chairpersons of the Senate and House of Representatives Health  
 81 and Human Services Committees no later than December 31, 2011; and
- 82 (7) To perform such other activities as the task force finds necessary or convenient in  
 83 order to accomplish its purposes under this Code section.
- 84 (e) The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities shall provide to  
 85 the task force necessary staff, research, and meeting facilities.
- 86 (f) The task force shall complete its work no later than December 31, 2011, and shall stand  
 87 abolished on January 1, 2012. This Code section shall be repealed by operation of law on  
 88 January 1, 2012."

### 89 SECTION 3

90 This Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law  
 91 without such approval.

### 92 SECTION 4.

93 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.