

STATE SENATOR • TUPAC A. HUNTER • 5TH DISTRICT

Hunter Press Release

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Hunter Recognizes World Autism Day, Calls for Action on Autism-related Legislation

Bills would support Autism research, needed health-related services

LANSING-Last December the United Nations General Assembly declared April 2 “World Autism Day” to raise awareness of the disease and the struggles of families affected by it. As the lead sponsor of several autism-related bills pending before the Michigan Senate, Sen. Tupac A. Hunter (D-Detroit) today renewed his call for action on legislation that would support autism research and provide health insurance coverage for critical forms of therapy.

“With our country’s startling autism rate of roughly one in every 150 children born, this is clearly an epidemic that we simply cannot ignore,” said Sen. Hunter. “There are effective forms of therapy available to children with autism and exciting new research is being conducted every day, but we need to pass my bills to make sure more Michigan families have access to the treatment their children need.”

Senate Bills 784 and 785 would create a check-off box on the state income tax form for filers to donate to the newly proposed Autism Research Fund, which will promote research relating to autism. The House recently passed similar legislation, which is now pending before the Senate.

Last fall Sen. Hunter also introduced SB 957, which would require insurance companies to provide coverage for autism-related services. Without private group health insurance coverage, parents are often forced either to pay out-of-pocket or forego the necessary treatments.

Two new studies were published in today’s issue of Pediatrics Magazine in honor of World Autism Day. The first indicates that children who were born prematurely at low birth weights are more likely to develop autism. Twenty-five percent of the toddlers in this study tested positive on the M-CHAT test, which is an early diagnostic tool for predicting autism. The second study released today found that families who have a child with autism earn an average of \$6,200 less each year. This amount is usually due to lost wages associated with caring for an autistic child, and does not include expensive therapeutic treatments.

“There is hope for children diagnosed with autism, but we need to do everything we can

to ensure that their families have access to the treatments that will help them lead productive lives,” said Hunter.

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