

Embargoed for Release: 10:30AM
Sunday, December 20, 2009

Contact: Mayor Pete DiCianni
(630) 674-5198

Joan Olson
(630) 204-5820

RYAN JOINS LAWMAKERS AND ADVOCATES TO SUPPORT ILLINOIS FAMILIES LIVING WITH AUTISM

Elmhurst, IL--Republican Gubernatorial candidate Jim Ryan joined a coalition of lawmakers, social service agencies and advocates in a call for better funding of research into the causes and treatments for autism. The group gathered at Elmhurst City Hall and was hosted by Mayor Pete DiCianni to discuss autism's impact on the state of Illinois. The news conference came in response to Friday's release by the CDC of the latest prevalence figures on autism.

Former Illinois Attorney General and Republican candidate for Governor, Ryan said finding solutions, treatments and the cause of autism need to be a priority in this country from the federal level down to the state level. Ryan commented, "We need to get our state budget under control so we can focus on our true priorities--like helping our most vulnerable citizens."

On Friday, the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network office of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), unveiled its most recent data, collected from eight sites around the country, estimating about 1 in 110 children in the United States have autism with an estimated prevalence of about 1% of all U.S. children. A previous study released by the CDC in 2002 showed autism spectrum disorders (ASD) affected one in 150 children. Prevalence in boys was found to be 4.5 times higher than in girls. The report states 1 in 70 boys and 1 in 315 girls have autism.

"It is my intention to file a resolution in the Illinois House next month urging the US Congress and the President to address the CDC's estimates that 1 in every 110 children have an ASD. These numbers are staggering and new dollars are needed for research, therapy and treatment. The time to act is now," said state Representative Dennis Reboletti (R-Elmhurst).

Illinois Senator Dan Cronin (R-Elmhurst) said in Illinois too many programs that help families are not properly funded, "I think what's happened here in our state is shameful," said Cronin. He continued, "I think we've really let folks down when we don't even pay our bills to organizations like the Ray Graham Association here in my district."

Illinois Representative Angelo "Skip" Saviano (R-Elmwood Park) said, "Federal officials' acknowledgement of the startling numbers of children affected by autism underscores the public health crisis autism presents in Illinois. Some 10,000 families in Illinois are living with this complex neurological disorder. I was proud to sponsor legislation to provide insurance coverage

in Illinois for families with autism. But I am convinced that we need to understand what causes autism and how to treat it much better than we do now. I am committed to finding these answers."

Mayor Peter "Pete" DiCianni said, "The CDC is late to this game. They are telling those of us in the trenches what we already know. Autism is growing at an astounding rate," said Elmhurst Mayor Peter "Pete" DiCianni, who is the father of a daughter with autism. He continued, "I grew up in Elmhurst and I didn't know any children with autism. Now as an adult, autism is in my own family. It's in other families who live around my block. The story is the same in towns and cities all over Illinois." Mayor DiCianni continued, "As parents we want answers. Why are our children getting sick and what is the CDC's plan for combating autism? Better diagnosis does not account for a public health crisis that affects 1% of our population."

Autism Society of Illinois Executive Director Karen McDonough said, "This report confirms what we at the Autism Society of Illinois have been saying for years about the prevalence of this disorder. Figures from our own state Board of Education tell us more than 12,000 Illinois students received special education services under the category of autism in 2008. This reflects a 624% increase since 1997." She continued, "The question remains: How much of an increase does it take before we thoroughly investigate all factors that may be contributing to this epidemic? Americans in each state must tell the federal government now is the time to put dollars and effort into research, effective treatments and a cure. We need comprehensive solutions and services for all persons with autism."

While in recent years Illinois has passed laws requiring insurance coverage for some treatments for children with autism and established a Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver, the State still falls woefully short of meeting the actual needs of this community. Demand for information and referrals have grown steadily, according to figures from the Autism Society of Illinois. The number of families who phone ASI with questions increased 70% since 2007. Most of the calls come from parents who have just had a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder or from families trying to plan for an adult child with autism.

Christina Blakey, member of Talk About Curing Autism (TACA), and a mother of a child with autism, referred to an interview done Friday with Dr. Tom Insel, the Director of the National Institutes of Mental Health and the nation's top autism research coordinator as Chair of the federal Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee. Mrs. Blakey recalled Dr. Insel's assertion, "As far as I can tell, the burden of proof is upon anybody who feels that there is not a real increase here in the number of kids affected," He said factors such as better ascertainment "don't really explain away this huge increase."

In Dr. Insel's interview with journalist David Kirby, he added that he never saw a single case of autism during his training in the mid-1980s, including a full year's rotation in child psychology. "I wanted to see children with autism. I couldn't find them," he said. "Now I wouldn't have to go any further than the block where I live to see kids with autism today."

####

To read the entire report and analysis of the ADDM data please go to;
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/addm.html

To read Mr. Kirby's entire article discussing his interview with Dr. Insel, please go to;

www.ageofautism.com