

Kansas Department of

Social and Rehabilitation Services

Don Jordan, Secretary

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Senate Education Committee

February 5, 2007

SB 138

Public and Governmental Services

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Chairperson Schodorf and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler. I am the Deputy Secretary for Public and Governmental Services at SRS. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to provide testimony on SB 138 which would establish the Autism Task Force. We very much support this concept.

SRS has set many goals to address the significant growth of autism cases and the existing gaps in services for this population. For many years, we have proposed as a part of our budget an autism waiver that would provide early intervention services to kids who have autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). We have established a multi-disciplinary group which includes individuals from the fields of mental health, developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, and child welfare along with parents who have children with ASDs to work on the blueprint for an autism waiver. The larger group has been meeting since September. A smaller subgroup has been formed to work on the specific components of the waiver and report back to the larger group. Our goal is that the work on the waiver be completed by May with the anticipated submission to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) by June of this year. With a successful submission, we hope to offer enhanced services through this waiver starting in January 2008. We believe that by using early intervention, this will not only enhance the life of the child and his or her family, but also prevent many of the children from accessing SRS caseloads later in life which could help avoid significant costs to the state.

According to our research, five other states have established Autism Task Forces that have representatives from the respective human services agencies. SRS supports SB 138 with the following suggested amendments: the inclusion of SRS, KDHE, and the Department of Education as ex-officio members; the requirement that both an occupational therapist and a speech language pathologist be appointed to the task force, rather than one or the other; and lastly, that all appointing authorities make the appointment of a parent of a child of an ASD to the task force. Although this final recommendation raises the number of members from thirteen to eighteen, some of the most valuable feedback SRS has received in studying the gaps in services to this population has been from parents. Prior to the establishment of our current work groups, we held Parent Forums in August in the communities of Topeka, Hays, and Wichita. These were sponsored by the Governor's Commission on Autism which SRS staffs.

In closing, SRS expresses its support for a task force with the multi-disciplinary membership that is recommended. We acknowledge that no one agency and no one field of expertise will be able to address autism spectrum disorders but through the kind of thoughtful collaboration that is suggested by the establishment of this task force, we may be able to offer greater solutions for persons with ASDs in the future. This concludes my testimony, and I would be happy to stand for questions.