



Senator

Liz Figueroa

Tenth Senatorial District

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FIGUEROA TURNS SPOTLIGHT ON AUTISM *Resolution Seeks to Educate Public about the Neurological Disorder*

Sacramento, CA—Joining the growing national effort to increase the public's understanding of autism, State Senator Liz Figueroa (D-Fremont) introduced Senate Concurrence Resolution 43 (SCR 43) which declares April as Autism Awareness Month.

Autism is a neurological disorder characterized by difficulty in communicating and forming social relationships. Autistic children can have trouble picking up emotional cues or interpreting facial expressions. Some children develop obsessive interests or make repetitive movements, and symptoms can range from mild to severe. Parents often report their autistic child seemed normal at birth but then regressed, losing speech and social skills.

"Autism is a mysterious disorder which is increasing in numbers. Today, one-out-of-every 166 children is diagnosed with some form of autism," said Senator Figueroa. "There is a strong and growing need to promote greater awareness regarding detection, education, and treatment."

In 2003, California's Department of Developmental Services was treating 26,000 cases of autism. During the last two years, there has been a 13 percent increase, averaging 3,000 new cases each year, with the vast majority occurring in children 13 years or younger.

"The near-epidemic that is affecting the children of our state has now been formally acknowledged, thanks to SCR 43," said Dan and Jennifer Hoffiz, co-founders of The Sensory Center in Pleasanton and parents of a son who was diagnosed with autism. "Increasing everyone's awareness about the importance of early and accurate diagnosis is critical – as is expanding the public's knowledge about new approaches to successful intervention."

As autism continues to increase, so have the demands for early identification and intervention services. However, there is no single "cure" for autism, and no one treatment that works for every child. Early diagnosis is extremely important because prompt educational intervention is the key to greater progress in children's mastery of fundamental communication, social, and cognitive skills.

SCR 43 also declares the Legislature's support for increasing federal funding for autism research and California's continuing support of research into the causes and treatment of autism. Further, the measure commends the United States Department of Health and Human Services for the swift implementation of the Children's Health Act of 2000 and stresses the need to begin early intervention services soon after a child has been diagnosed with autism.

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