

weap: The People

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Autism Insurance Update

Amy Masek, MS

WEAP Director of Development & Outreach

Gridlock on the state budget was finally broken on Friday, October 19, when state lawmakers compromised to strike the final version of the budget for 2007-2009. In a disappointing turn of events, the Governor's Autism Insurance Proposal was removed from the budget just hours before a final compromise was reached. Families and advocates across the state are disappointed that our cause was not included in the final budget, but have not given up on this important issue. In fact, we are more committed than ever to succeeding in achieving fairness in insurance coverage for our loved ones with ASDs.

Senate Bill 178 is "Plan B" for reaching our goal. This important piece of legislation was introduced by Senator Judy Robson (D-Beloit, 15th district) and already has bi-partisan support in the Senate, where it passed out of committee last week. It is now in the hands of the Joint Finance Committee to study the fiscal impact. Senator Robson was voted out as the Senate Majority Leader shortly after the budget compromise was made, but was quickly appointed to the Joint Finance Committee by the new Senate Majority Leader, Sen. Russ Decker (D-Weston, 29th district). After moving out of the Joint Finance

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A WEAP Walker for Autism

Justin Sallows

Wisconsin Early Autism Project

Warner Park was host to the third annual Friends of Autism "Walk for Autism" on Sunday, October 7th. It was an unusually hot day for fall with temperatures soaring into the mid 80's. Humidity was a factor and all morning there had been a thick overcast which caused worry about rain. That didn't stop hundreds from coming out and showing their support for each other and autism groups around the state.

I was struck by the makeup of the crowd. The Walk for Autism is not aimed at Olympic athletes; this is an event for families. People of all shapes, sizes and ages proudly marched along, putting their conviction into action. These were grandparents, friends, brothers, sisters, children in strollers and many others affected by autism standing together to make a difference.

The festivities began just off the parking lot where various groups set up booths. WEAP's booth had handouts explaining our various services. Host group Friends of Autism had the largest space with free pens and all manner of items available for sale at bargain prices.

Walk teams wore shirts displaying their unity. The sense of meaning and purpose was palpable as I read some of their slogans. "Walking for Madelinn" and "Team Noah" both caught my attention.

I proudly donned my WEAP shirt and joined the masses at the starting line. As we waited for the 1:00 p.m. start, the sun emerged from the clouds.

Radio station Q106, sponsored the event and had staff there playing country and rock music which added to the upbeat feel of the occasion. The Q106 mascot, Bossy the Cow, made an appearance to cheer us on.

As we rounded the first corner of the walk, a few cars honked and waved, supporting our cause.

Along the way I met Justin Sargent who is running for

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Committee, the next step is a vote on the Senate floor. We are hopeful this will occur sometime in the next few weeks. It is expected to pass the Senate quickly, and will move to the Assembly for consideration.

It will be extremely important that the autism community mobilize to support this critically important legislative action by expressing support to the Assembly Republicans. Look for more details in the coming weeks, and get ready to put the pressure on the Assembly to support our loved ones!

What can you do now? Contact every one of your friends, family members and co-workers and encourage them to support insurance for people with autism in our state. Every letter and phone call counts! If your legislators already support this, please thank them and ask for their continued support. If your legislators are not currently in support, ask why and encourage them to reconsider. If we can be helpful in providing information to any legislator not currently supporting this issue, please let us know! We would like to keep tabs on where legislators are on this issue, so please contact us to let us know if your legislator is in support or against. For more information or to report in on your communications with your legislators, please contact: Jill Lins, Executive Assistant, 608-288-9040; jlins@wiautism.com. Thanks, and stay tuned!♦

Jenny McCarthy Heats up the Madison Women's Expo

Justin Sallows

Wisconsin Early Autism Project



Left to right: Amy Masek -Director of Development & Outreach, Dr. Glen Sallows-President, Nell Justiliano-Madison Clinical Director, Jenny McCarthy, Michelle Sherman-Director of Clinical Services, Tamlynn Graupner-CEO, and Sandy Schultz- Director of Finance.

For the weekend of November 19th, the Alliant Energy Center hosted the 9th annual Madison Women's Expo. Jenny McCarthy, author of such books as *Baby Laughs: The Naked Truth About the First Year of Mommyhood*, took the main stage on Saturday to discuss her experience with autism.

McCarthy is the latest high profile person to come out and support action for families with autism in their lives. NFL hall-of-famer Dan Marino and New England Patriots Quarterback Doug Flutie have discussed their children's condition publicly while John Travolta and Sylvester Stallone have elected not to.

At an early press briefing, McCarthy called for autism therapy to be covered by insurance, and stressed the importance of early intervention. She was joined by Senator John Erpenbach (D), Reps. Sody Pope-Roberts (D) and Terese Berceau (D) who all expressed concern for the long wait list for early intervention and reasserted their support for Senate Bill 178.

McCarthy begins her story at her son Evan's birth. She goes on to detail his seizures, one of which lasted 7 hours. When he was 3 years old, Evan was diagnosed with autism. McCarthy was told that help was available for Evan's condition, but that she would not have access to it for 18 months.

This experience was the impetus for her most recent book *Louder Than Words: A Mother's Journey in Healing Autism*. In it she details the good and the bad of dealing with the disorder and the apparent eventual repealing of the diagnoses.

Closing out her time on stage, Jenny showed a cut together preview for a film she is making about her experience with autism and subsequent speaking tour. It is strongly hinted that she intends to speak before Congress. The preview was very well made with original music and high production value. It was quite affecting on the attending audience.

After her presentation ended with a standing ovation, McCarthy found the time to speak with some parents of autistic children despite needing to be on a plane 45 minutes later.

Incidents of autism continue to rise. The CDC recently reported that 1 in every 150 children born in America will be diagnosed as having some form of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Autism certainly needs a public face, someone who will take this issue to a national level and focus attention on its detrimental effects on everyone involved. Jenny McCarthy's passion is palpable and moving.

If Jenny McCarthy can get the autism community the attention and federal financing it needs to find new treatments and therapies, that can only be a good thing.♦

Reality Show Contestant with Aspergers

Justin Sallows

Wisconsin Early Autism Project

America's Next Top Model is a reality show on The CW Wednesday's at 7 p.m. with an encore presentation Sunday's at 8 p.m. In its ninth year, the new lineup consists of 33 young women competing for a modeling contract.

The contestants pose for a unique photo shoot every episode which is evaluated by a panel of judges headed by supermodel Tyra Banks. Every week one girl leaves the contest.

They are competing for a \$100,000 contract with Cover Girl cosmetics and to be managed by Elite Model Management. The winner will also appear on the cover of Seventeen Magazine and have a six-page fashion photo spread in the magazine.

One of the finalists was 21-year-old Heather Kuzmich from Valparaiso, Indiana. She was diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome, a high functioning form of autism.

Despite some social awkwardness, Heather made it to the final four of the competition before being cut on November 28th. On reflection, Heather says "I first came in here thinking my Asperger's would be way more of a problem than it really



was. I thought I wouldn't be able to get along with any of the girls -- I'd be too different -- and since I've been here, I've learned so much. I learned to be more confident and I plan to not always be so self-conscious... I think the experience is much more than a prize."

She will undoubtedly go on to have a successful modeling career if she so chooses♦

the State Assembly. He is an adamant supporter of autism funding in our state. He had set up a small card table with cups of water that he offered to the walkers.

I also had the opportunity to meet a mother and her son who is challenged by autism and riding in a wagon. We talked for a few minutes about how autism had affected the lives of her family. ABA therapy had helped her son overcome many challenges. She said she was here to raise awareness in the community and support Friends of Autism which had given so much to the autism community.

As I finished the walk, I was pretty beat, but exhilarated. I had become part of something larger than myself. This community of families affected by autism is a force to be reckoned with. We had all stood together to raise awareness for autism.

As I cooled down in the shade of a tree, I ate a brat, drank a soda and reflected on my experience. I watched as children played on the inflatable play area sponsored by WEAP and I felt very proud of what we all had achieved.

More than one thousand walkers raised over \$50,000 to fund autism research, grants for families in need and autism awareness education.

I'm going back to the Walk For Autism next year because it gave me something I couldn't achieve on my own: a sense of communal pride and a knowledge that in some way I had contributed to something larger than myself. See you there! ♦

Know your Representative

You can find your state legislators with the following link. Please use it to contact them and let them know how important autism funding is to you and your family.

<http://waml.legis.state.wi.us>

Current Openings

<p>GREEN BAY 920-338-1610</p> <p>Fond du Lac Green Bay (after school) Manitowoc Sheboygan</p>	<p>MILWAUKEE 262-432-5660</p> <p>Burlington Cudahy Iron Ridge Juneau Kenosha Milwaukee Mukwonago Muskego</p> <p>Nashotah New Berlin Oak Creek Oconomowoc Pewaukee Port Washington Racine Sussex Union Grove Waukesha West Allis</p>	<p>MADISON 608-288-9040</p> <p>Madison Pardeeville Portage Reedsburg Watertown</p>	<p>EAU CLAIRE-LA CROSSE 608-781-6500</p> <p>Ellsworth Hudson Mondovi Norwalk River Falls</p>
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