

Testimony Expansion of Colorado Children with Autism Waiver: 4/9/15

Good Afternoon. I am Corry Robinson Rosenberg, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry and Director of JFK Partners Program at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, Anschutz Medical Campus. My experience with Autism includes being the Principle Investigator on a number of federally funded research projects that look at the prevalence of Autism and strategies for treating Autism. I was part of the group involved in the initial development of the Children with Autism Waiver and I served on the 2008 State Autism commission. I want to express my appreciation for the continued opportunities legislation has given to assist in serving Coloradoans with Autism and their families.

From my involvement in the Center for Disease Control funded studies of the prevalence of Autism I am able to attest to the believability of the numbers of individuals who are diagnosed with Autism. While there is some variability across the country the figure we have obtained from the prevalence work in Metro Denver is consistent with the National figure of one in 88 children. This 1 in 88 figure is based upon review of school and medical records when these students were eight years old. The CDC selected that age because they knew that age is the point at which the numbers peak. I am confident in the numbers being reported and also confident that the current waiting list of 320 children is probably an underestimate of the total number of children especially since the current age cap is six years of age.

I also want to speak to several of the other provisions of the waiver. Raising the upper age of enrollment, to the day before a child's eight birthday, and then allowing for a full three years of service is a critical change. Also critical is the inclusion of program evaluation in the form of reporting enrollee's progress in communication, social and adaptive skills and decreases in aggressive and self-injurious behaviors. This Evaluation which was authorized several years ago, but not implemented until 2014 is an important aspect of the considerable investment the state is making. While there is close to universal agreement regarding the effectiveness of early intervention for children with Autism there is a considerable range across children in the amount of progress that they make with similar levels of intensity. Furthermore we know very little about the factors involved in this variability. Requiring reports of functioning on each child every six months will foremost provide each child's family and intervention team with information that will allow them to refine the child's intervention plan. However given that around 500 children per year will be evaluated at least six times over the three or more years of enrollment Information will be available to refine treatment for not only individual children and their family's needs but also for the population as a whole.

In summary, I enthusiastically endorse this expansion of the Children with Autism Waiver and its several enhancements. I believe this expansion is critical to the well-being of these children and their families.

Thank you.