

My name is Dan West and my wife and I are the proud parents of three boys ages 4, 6 and 8. Unfortunately, our two oldest boys are autistic. When our eight year old was diagnosed at around the age of 2 years old the Doctor gave us a brochure for the Colorado Autism Society and wished us good luck. I think the Doctor would have liked to have been more helpful but he knew two things that we did not but would quickly learn. First, our insurance would not cover any type of treatment for our son and unless we were incredibly rich (which we were obviously not) there is no way we would be able to pay for treatment.

Once we began investigating treatments for our son we were advised by a well known physician at University of Colorado Health Science Center that he would need 25 hours per week in therapy. Specifically, we were told if we can't facilitate 25 hours of therapy, then not to bother doing any at all. My family was fortunate. My parents were able to help us financially. My mortgage is \$1,500 per month. The monthly costs for therapy for just one of my children approached \$4,000 per month at its height. How many people in this room could afford that? More over how many young families could absorb that cost?

My family and I support SB244 because we have seen what early intervention can do. If my 8 year old was here today nobody would know that he was autistic. Yet he was almost three years old before he spoke his first word. He spent hours and hours of therapy learning simply how to look someone in the eyes and respond to his own name. Through all these hours of hard work however he has emerged as someone who is well on his way to be a productive member of society. My 6 year old is a little more severe but we have seen the dramatic strides he has made and I would never write off a kindergartner.

I testified almost a year ago in support of the bill that created the Autism Commission. One of the Senators in that hearing advised all of those who would be testifying that everyone on the Committee was very familiar with autism. I would submit that the Senator may have understood the facts regarding autism (i.e. 1 out of 150 children are afflicted with autism; 1 out of 91 boys are afflicted with autism); however, what he does not understand is how it is to live on a daily basis with children with autism. My wife cannot work outside the home because taking care of our children is more than a full time job. For three years she drove to Denver every weekday from our home in Monument (a 100 mile round trip) to get the therapy our children needed. There was a time period that our fuel cost alone was more than \$1,000 per month. I cannot imagine having a child with a serious illness such as cancer. However, the parents of those families have one thing that we do not have and that is insurance coverage that would help pay for the treatment their children so desperately need. It is no wonder that the divorce rate for parents of children with autism is through the roof. Not only do they have to deal with the devastation of having a child with a serious illness but also with the helplessness of not being able to afford treatment or the financial devastation that can result if they try to get the treatment.

We want every family affected by autism to have the opportunities that our sons Nick and Jack received. The only way to facilitate that is to pass a mandate that ensures insurance companies are not allowed to discriminate against children with autism. If we are not proactive and do something now we will be faced with a generation of children who will grow up to be dependent on the state. This is a far worse result than the half percent premium increase that is estimated by the Colorado Division of Insurance Actuaries.