



Senator Ray Cleary

State Senate District 28: Horry County . Georgetown County . Charleston County

October 17, 2008

Autism: Setting the Record Straight

As its original author, I am obligated to clear up the confusion and set the record straight on the autism legislation recently passed by the General Assembly.

In the summer of 2005, I met with an autism advocacy group in Mt. Pleasant dedicated to insuring that treatment for children who suffer from this serious condition would be mandated for coverage by the plans and policies of insurance companies. Their stories convinced me that we needed to help find solutions to Autism in South Carolina.

In January of 2006, I introduced the Autism Mandate Bill. Although we did not pass the bill that year, we were able to secure \$5,000,000 for a pilot program – a major success – and almost as important, we dramatically increased awareness of this issue.

The rules of the Senate require that bills must be re-introduced after an election cycle and when I went to re-submit my original Autism legislation, I was surprised to learn that Senator Elliott had taken my 2006 bill and introduced it as his own. Ronald Reagan often said “don’t worry about who gets the credit, worry about getting the job done,” a philosophy I’ve tried to practice all my life. So, I put aside pride of authorship in the best interests of parents and children affected by autism. We held numerous meetings with representatives of insurance companies – Shelvie Belsen with Blue Cross and Larry Marchant with health insurance underwriters, to name just a few.

With all due respect, Senator Elliott was not present at any of these meetings, nor am I aware of any other meetings that he attended on this subject ... although he was present at the press conference announcing the great progress that had been made.

The truth is that a small group of dedicated mothers met in Columbia weekly and organized the entire state on their mission to secure insurance coverage. Senator Joel Lourie (D-Columbia) dedicated many hours to this effort. Its passage could not have been accomplished without his persistence. That is how this legislation moved along and passed and, although I am proud to have been involved, these people are the real heroes and the real reason that autism legislation has become law.

Sincerely,

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