

By: Representatives Akins, Holland, Eaton,
Rotenberry, Gadd, Lane, Turner

To: Education

HOUSE BILL NO. 1267
(As Sent to Governor)

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE CARING FOR MISSISSIPPI INDIVIDUALS WITH
2 AUTISM TASK FORCE; TO PROVIDE FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK
3 FORCE; TO SET FORTH THE DUTIES OF THE TASK FORCE; AND FOR RELATED
4 PURPOSES.

5 WHEREAS, autism is a complex developmental disability that
6 typically appears during the first three (3) years of life and is
7 part of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders
8 (ASD); and

9 WHEREAS, as of the effective date of this act, at least one
10 (1) in one hundred sixty-six (166) individuals in the United
11 States is diagnosed with autism, making it more common than the
12 occurrences in our population of pediatric cancer, diabetes, and
13 AIDS combined; and

14 WHEREAS, autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and
15 relate to others; is associated with rigid routines and repetitive
16 behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very
17 specific routines; is four (4) times more likely to strike boys
18 than girls; and occurs in all racial, ethnic and social groups;
19 and

20 WHEREAS, symptoms of the disability can range from very mild
21 to quite severe, and autistic behaviors not only make life
22 difficult for those individuals who suffer from the disability,
23 but also make life hard for their families, health care providers
24 and teachers; and

25 WHEREAS, families coping with this devastating illness are
26 searching for answers about its causes, diagnosis, prevention and
27 treatment, and while there is no known means to prevent the
28 disability, there are indications that early intervention in an

29 appropriate educational setting for at least two (2) years during
30 the preschool years can result in significant improvements for
31 many young children with the disorder; and

32 WHEREAS, the Mississippi Legislature recognizes that
33 strategies for how to best identify, treat and accommodate the
34 needs of individuals with autism and of their families are
35 urgently needed in our state; NOW, THEREFORE,

36 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

37 **SECTION 1.** (1) The Caring for Mississippi Individuals with
38 Autism Task Force is created to study and make recommendations to
39 the Mississippi Legislature regarding the growing incidence of
40 autism and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), how to identify, treat
41 and accommodate the needs of individuals with autism and ASD, and
42 ways to improve the delivery and coordination of state services
43 provided to individuals with autism and ASD. Members of the task
44 force shall be composed of the following:

45 (a) Three (3) persons who are the parents of children
46 with autism or ASD, with one (1) such person to be appointed by
47 the Governor, one (1) to be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor,
48 and one (1) to be appointed by the Speaker of the House;

49 (b) One (1) person who is a member of the governing
50 body of a school district, to be appointed by the State
51 Superintendent of Public Education;

52 (c) One (1) person who represents the State Department
53 of Education, to be appointed by the State Superintendent of
54 Public Education;

55 (d) One (1) person who is the director of special
56 education services in a school district, to be appointed by the
57 State Superintendent of Public Education;

58 (e) One (1) person who is a representative of the State
59 Department of Mental Health, to be appointed by the executive
60 director of the department;

61 (f) Three (3) persons who are representatives of the
62 State Department of Mental Health who are from regions in the
63 state that provide services to individuals with autism or ASD, to
64 be appointed by the executive director of the department;

65 (g) One (1) person who is a representative of the
66 University of Mississippi Medical Center and who provides medical
67 or other services to individuals with autism or ASD, to be
68 appointed by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Mississippi
69 Medical Center;

70 (h) Two (2) persons who are Mississippi pediatricians
71 engaged in the private practice of medicine and who provide
72 treatment to individuals with autism or ASD, to be appointed by
73 the Vice Chancellor of the University of Mississippi Medical
74 Center;

75 (i) Two (2) persons who are licensed therapists
76 appointed by the President of the Mississippi Speech Language and
77 Hearing Association.

78 (2) The task force shall:

79 (a) Review the best practices of other states with
80 regard to educational, medical and early intervention services
81 provided to individuals diagnosed with autism or ASD and identify
82 the best practices of other states;

83 (b) Review the standard of services provided by local
84 Mississippi school districts and early intervention programs to
85 individuals diagnosed with autism or ASD, identify any additional
86 potential funding sources for school districts, and identify
87 guidelines for measurable educational and instructional goals that
88 can be used by members of the education community for serving
89 children with autism or ASD;

90 (c) Assess the medical availability of services
91 currently provided for early screening, diagnosis and treatment of
92 autism and ASD and provide recommendations for enhancing medical
93 services;

94 (d) Identify the role of higher education in developing
95 a workforce in Mississippi possessing the skills necessary to
96 assist individuals with autism or ASD in medical, educational, and
97 vocational efforts or in providing additional services associated
98 with autism or ASD;

99 (e) Evaluate and identify any and all additional
100 relevant information and make legislative recommendations
101 regarding the development and implementation of a continuum of
102 educational and medical services for individuals with autism or
103 ASD; and

104 (f) File a report with those standing committees of the
105 Mississippi State Legislature and with those state agencies having
106 jurisdiction over specific recommendations of the task force, not
107 later than December 1, 2007.

108 (3) The task force shall hold its first meeting not later
109 than April 1, 2007, with the date, time and location of the
110 meeting to be designated by the Governor. At that first meeting,
111 the task force shall elect from among its membership a chairman,
112 vice chairman and any other officers determined to be necessary,
113 and shall set the date, time and location of its next meeting.

114 (4) The State Department of Mental Health shall provide the
115 staff and other support necessary for the Caring for Mississippi
116 Individuals with Autism Task Force to perform its duties.

117 **SECTION 2.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
118 and after its passage.